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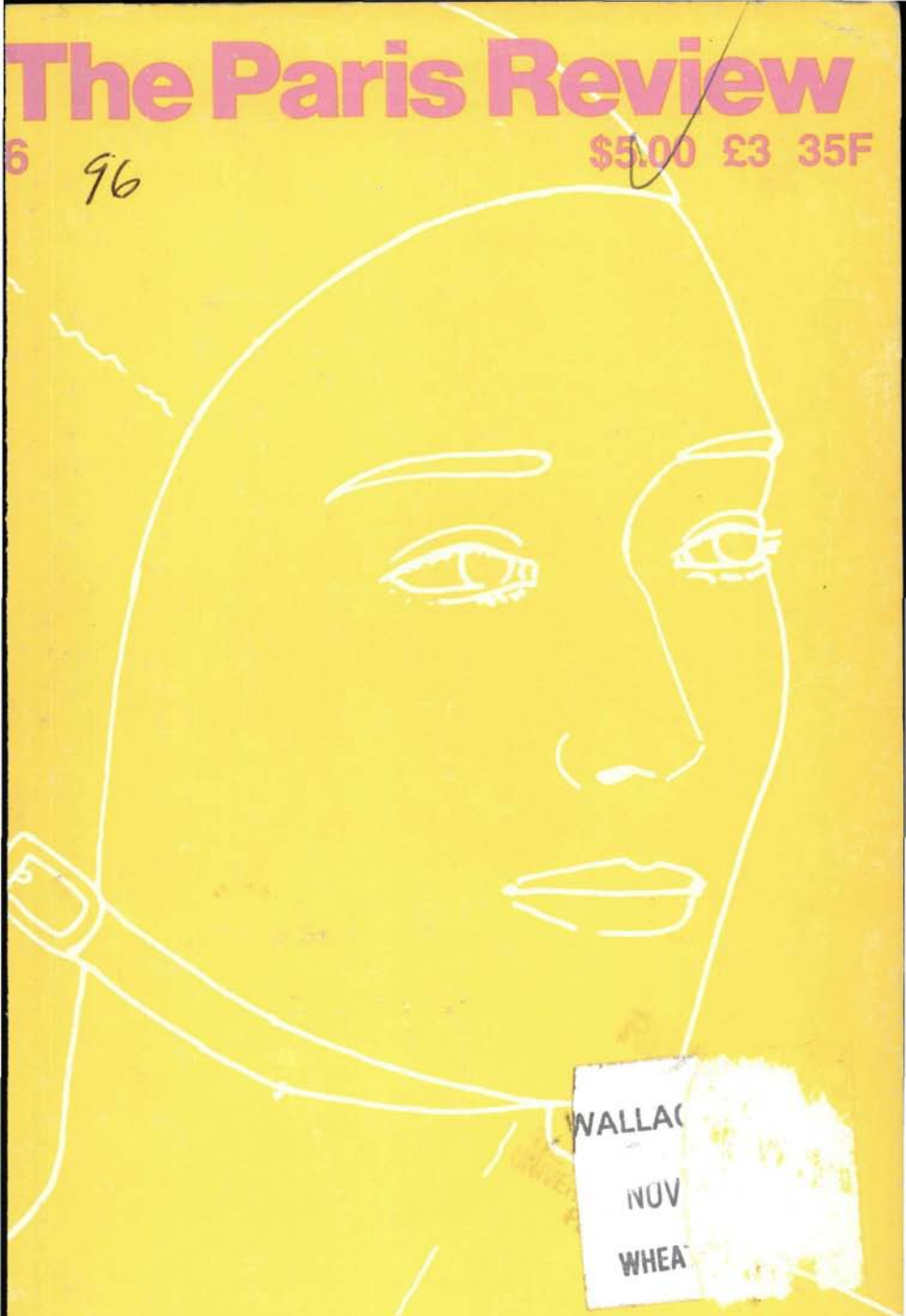

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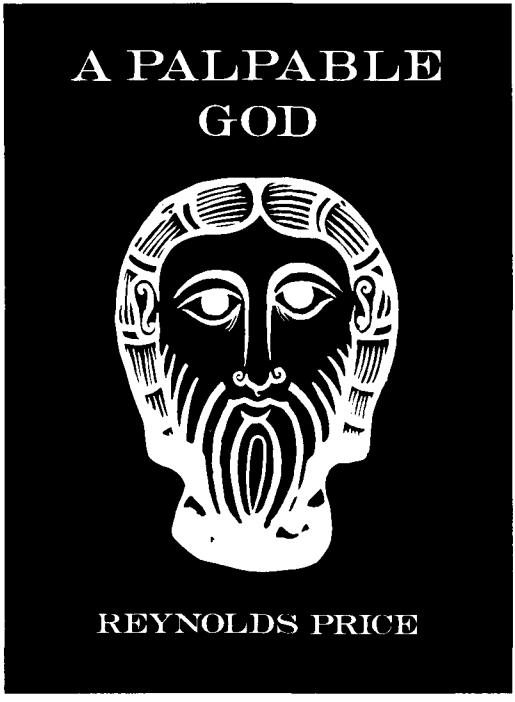

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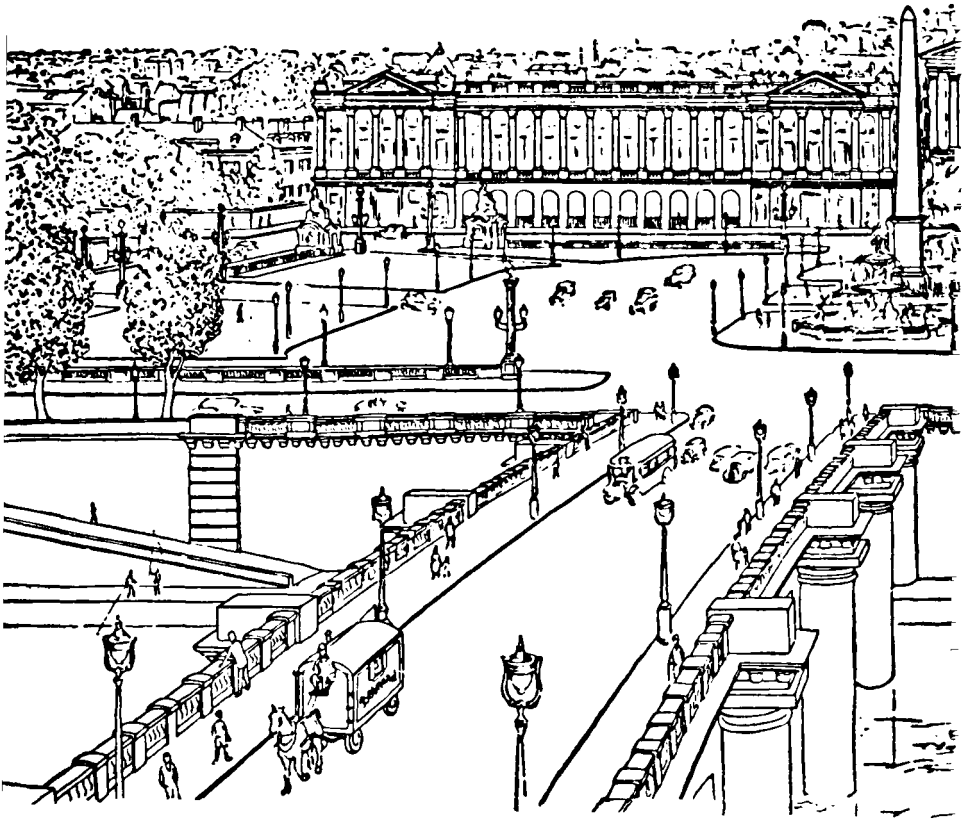

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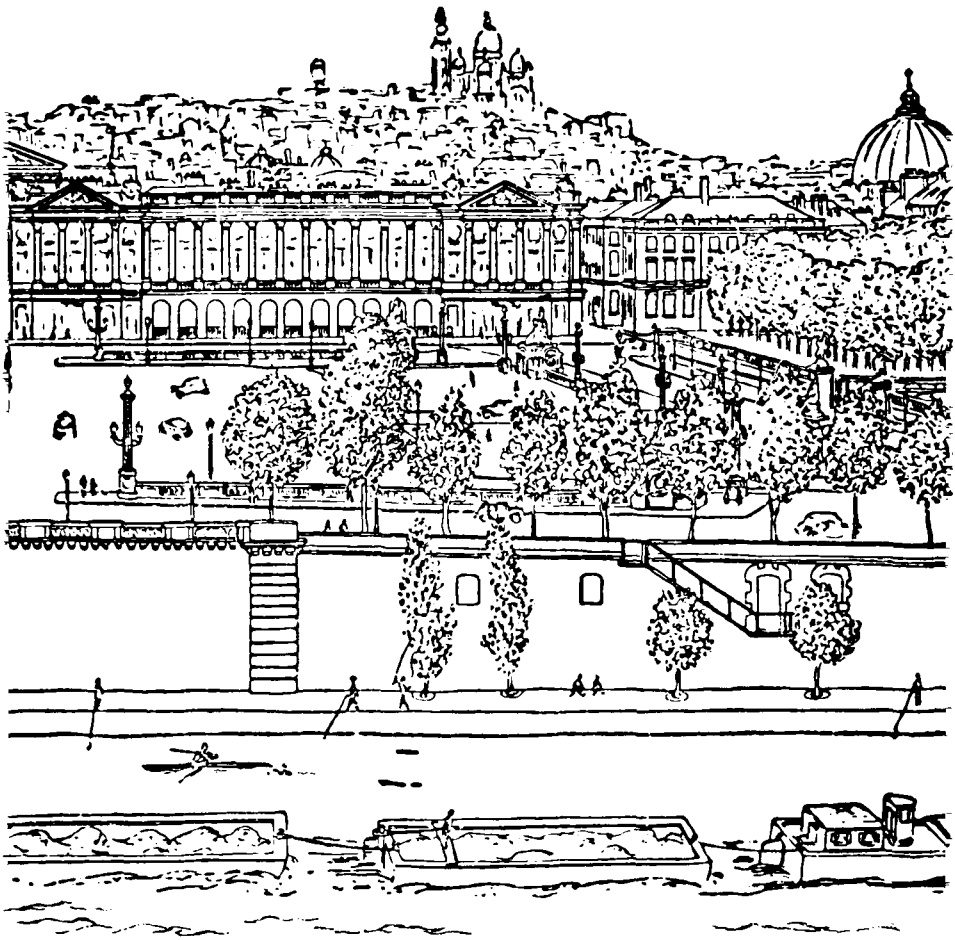

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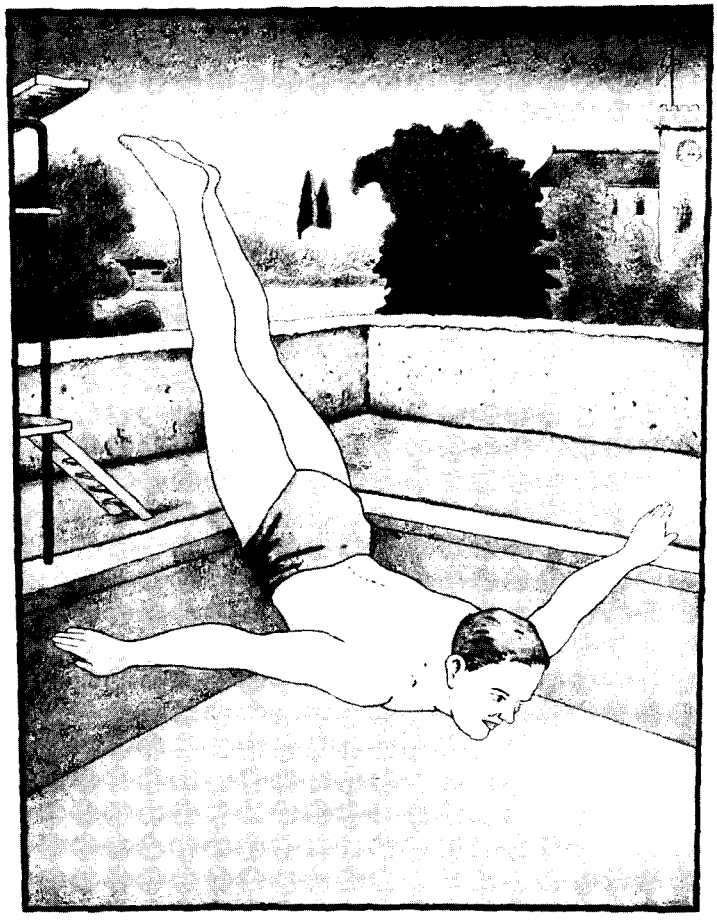

IT WAS AT THAT PRECISE MOMENT THAT DICK REALIZED THE POOL HAD BEEN DRAINED

Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois.
Cover by Alex Katz, *Bather*, 1985, ink on paper.
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Number 96

	Interviews	
Elizabeth Hardwick	*The Art of Fiction LXXXVII*	20
Rosamond Lehmann	*The Art of Fiction LXXXVIII*	162
	Features	
Janet Flanner	*Letters to a Friend*	107
	Fiction	
Paul Auster	*In the Country of Last Things*	204
Tess Gallagher	*The Leper*	144
Rose Tremain	*Will and Lou's Boy*	12
	Art	
Glen Baxter	*It Was The Smallest Pizza They Had Ever Seen*	81
Philip Guston	*Drawings*	153
	Poetry	
Rita Dove	*Three Poems*	102
Jaan Kaplinski	*Three Poems*	99
Galway Kinnell	*Four Poems*	90
Sharon Olds	*Three Poems*	95
James Schuyler	*A Few Days*	52
Jean Sénac	*Five Poems*	134
	Poetry Feature	
Stephen Spender	*Revisions*	186
	Notes on Contributors	226

The Paris Review is pleased to announce that James Schuyler is the 1985 winner of the Bernard F. Conners Prize for his poem "A Few Days," which appears in this issue.

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Will and Lou's Boy

Rose Tremain

This was an average dawn in the early summer of 1948, the year I got to be eighteen.

"Eat your fishcake, Dougie," said Lou.

They were barracuda fishcakes. Awful. They tasted like it was the fish's seaweedy liver you were eating.

"Yes, eat your fishcake, Doug," said Will.

Will and Lou. I thought of them as one: *Willou*. I was their son, Douglas. I was their only child.

Chief in our household was Lou's obsession to win the Queen Mary Gardening Cup. In 1947, we'd entered for the Princess Royal Gardening Cup, but we hadn't won it and Lou had turned her disappointment into rage. Until then, she'd been a moderately contented woman. Now, she was raging and cooking barracuda. The world was funny those years.

We had a pre-fab. They'd built the row we were on in about one day. Only pre-fab dwellers were allowed to enter for the gardening cups. Rain had knocked down a lot of Lou's gladioli the night before Cup Day. It hadn't rained in Wandsworth, where the winner lived, and this was one among lots of things that didn't seem fair to Lou. "Soddin' Wandsworth!" she'd say. She never normally swore much. She'd learnt "soddin' " from my Aunt If, who'd learnt it from my Uncle Pepino who sold ice cream and illegal nylons meant for export. My Uncle Pepino was Italian, but pretended not to be during the war.

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"Call me Pep," he'd ask. "Yes, call him Peppy," said Aunt If, who, at the age of sixteen, had rebaptized herself Iphigenia. Her old name, which my father still used sometimes, was Gladys. She could get as angry about being called Gladys as Lou could get about Wandsworth. The men in our family, including me, seem to be calmer people than the women. Peppy was arrested that year, but he stayed calm.

The best thing about dawn in that pre-fab was knowing you'd be out of it all day. We were all out, even Lou, who worked in a rayon factory. Will was a wireless assembler. He had the same reverence for wirelesses as some people have for God. He relied on the Home Service to tell him who or what he was. He'd polish our wireless, this fount of understanding, with Min Cream and old stockings. Lou said a man like him ought to have a secure future. And she'd look at me. Sometimes, this sideways look of hers made me think she was thinking I didn't have a future of any kind, let alone secure. Lou and Will. Will and Lou. *Willou*.

I was a park attendant. My wage was four pound ten a week, not bad for then. Bits of my park had been ploughed up and sown with barley. This barley spoilt the atmosphere of the park, made it somehow noisier. Also, the kids used the barley to piss in. I'd see the heads of the girls, squatted down. But despite or notwithstanding the barley, I loved that park. That year, all the benches were getting painted and the fishpond was restocked with goldfish. We had a new Head of Parks called Mr. Dowdswell, who wasn't like a clerk, but more like a visionary. The day they ploughed up his lawns for cereal, he developed the habit of tugging out hanks of his hair.

For my eighteenth birthday, Lou said, "You ask a friend, Dougie." I didn't have any friends really, as Lou perfectly well knew, so I asked Knacky Mick, who sold matches and empty boxes and tins of bootblack on the corner by my park gates. Knacky Mick was a Wicklow son, blue-pale in that way only the Irish are in winter. He must have been fifty. "I'm an orphan, you know, Doug," he often said. I liked him. When he heard I had an uncle getting black market stuff, he began to take an interest in me and sneak me matches for Lou, "For the

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gas fire, like." We didn't have a gas fire in the pre-fab. We didn't have a fire at all, but a paraffin heater Lou christened Old Smokey. But Lou liked getting matches. She grew to expect it. Free anything, in those peculiar days, was appreciated—a rubber band, a safety pin, a half yard of knicker elastic . . . and one afternoon, Lou won second prize in a raffle, one solitary brown egg. The first prize was three bananas. Lou didn't complain. She scrambled the egg with a lot of milk and we shared it on toast. She dreamt about the bananas, though. She dreamt someone gave us a banana tree for the pre-fab garden.

Two things were coming: the party for my eighteenth birthday and the day of judgment in the Queen Mary Gardening Cup. There was a long heat wave. The barley in my park started to ripen. Courting couples began the habit of lying down in it and I was supposed to shoo them away. "I'm sorry, Sir, I'm afraid you're spoiling our crop," Mr. Dowdswell told me to say. One day, I said by mistake, "I'm sorry, Sir, I'm afraid you're *soiling* our crop," and I was so miserable at getting the wrong word, I left the couples alone after that, and the barley, which had once been a kids' lavatory, now became a field of iniquity.

The most iniquitous person in our family was my cousin, Patricia, daughter of Aunt If and Peppy the Italian. In the war, she'd fallen in love with a G.I. called Wedderburn C. Wicklens, a Southern, beefy man, raised with his gut full of corn pone and his brain full of cotton. He was from Louisiana State. Patricia could just imagine the kind of wooden house she'd own on the New Orleans delta, and when Wicklens left her in '46, she cried herself almost into the grave. Now, two years later, Wedderburn C. Wicklens was back and cousin Pat was made a bride. Peppy's son-in-law was exactly one foot and four inches taller than him, as witnessed to this day by the wedding photograph. In this picture, everyone's grinning except me. I'm standing to attention. "God!" Lou sometimes used to say, staring at the photo on Aunt If's tiled mantelpiece, "just look at that nincompoop!"

Preparing our garden for the Cup and preparing for this grand meal we'd have when I was eighteen took a lot of resourcefulness. We nicked bricks from the bomb site on Weatherby Road

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to make a garden "wall" that never got higher than two feet. I nicked bedding antirrhinums and nemesia from the park and stakes for the gladioli, over which Lou was taking no chances. I would have got the sack if Mr. Dowdswell had caught me, but Mr. Dowdswell was a man who saw vistas of things, not small transactions. Uncle Peppy, not yet in prison, figured big in our planning; so did Wicklens, whom we now addressed as "Wed." "In more than one sense Wed," I said. But no one laughed. "Shame Dougie was too young to see combat," I heard Wed say to Lou one evening. "Yes," she said, "it might have been the saving of him."

They thought being eighteen might be the saving of me. If we could just scrimp together enough ration cards, if Peppy could just do a nylons deal with the butcher, if Wed could just get whisky and chocolate powder and margarine from the PX, if If could just run me up a new tweed jacket. If, if, if. . . . "You'll feel better when you're eighteen, Dougie," Lou lullabyed as she tucked me in. "You'll feel more like a man." So I lay and thought about this. I didn't think I'd grow up like Will—to be good. I knew I wouldn't grow up like Peppy—to be smart. When I imagined my future, it was exactly the same as my present. The only thing that changed wasn't me but the park. They harvested the dirty barley. They ploughed in the stubble and back into the soil went the sweet papers and the used johnnies and the hairpins, and the land was resown with grass and everything in the park became orderly again. Mr. Dowdswell's hair grew back. We were allocated some new shears. The thing I wanted to say to Lou was, "I'm not unhappy."

Then we heard about the housing lottery.

The coming of the news about the housing lottery was like the coming of malaria. Lou began to sweat. It was like the jungle had suddenly surrounded her. She'd fan the air with her knitting patterns. "You can't breathe in this place," she'd say, making our barracuda cakes. "Help your mother," Will would say accusingly. So I'd set the table and get out the tea strainer and stare at Lou's arms, white and moist above the greasy pan. Love for Lou has always been something I've suffered from. Even in my imagined future, I still suffered from it. "I don't mind the

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pre-fab," I'd say to Lou's arms preparing our seaweed meal. Without looking up at me, she'd say, "Don't be silly, Douglas."

It was me they sent to get our lottery number. The Housing Office had women queuing right down the stairs and into the street. I missed an entire afternoon's work standing in that queue, risking my job for Lou's malaria. "You're not eligible if you've got a pre-fab, love," someone told me, but I hung on. There must have been a thousand people there, not counting babies, two thousand upper and lower jaws all wagging about hardship and eligibility and fairness. Our number was 879. Aunt If said this was auspicious because 879 was a close-together group of numbers. I thought of the number as representing our family. I was the thin 7 in the middle, with Lou and Will leaning over me. Even now—and they're both long dead, actually—I still sometimes think of Lou as 8 and Will as 9. "Dear God, please take care of the immortal souls of 8 and 9," I sometimes pray. And I feel them at my side, Will watching me, Lou with her profile turned.

A lot happened the following day. Mr. Dowdswell gave me a Severe Reprimand, Knacky Mick was taken to the hospital, and Uncle Pepino was arrested for illegal trading. Aunt If, who is something of a gypsy to look at, read catastrophe in the stars, pawned her sewing machine to raise Peppy's bail, and cried on Lou's shoulder. "At least," said Lou to her sister-in-law, "you've still got your own house." I left them and got a bus to the hospital. Our lottery ticket was stuck up on the mantelpiece behind a glass unicorn. Knacky Mick, when I found him, was Irish-blue under his stubble and dosed to his skull. "Suppressing me, they are," he muttered. In his locker were his matchboxes and his tins of shoeblack, piled up. "Come to a party," I said, "I'd like to invite you to my eighteenth birthday party."

"Very good," he said.

I didn't mind the hospital. I sat by Knacky Mick for quite a while. A drip was hitched up to his vein. Other patients winked at me, the ones on their own without visitors. Knacky Mick slept a drugged sleep. The room was high and light and full of people whispering. It wouldn't be bad, I thought, working here. This was the first time I ever imagined having a job quite

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far away from Will and Lou. It gave me an odd feeling, as if I'd made myself an orphan.

Now, four things were coming: the Gardening Cup, my eighteenth birthday party, Pepino's trial, and the housing lottery. No wonder Lou couldn't breathe. These things were like weights on her chest. My ideal future was one in which there was nothing to fear and nothing to hope for. I didn't mind if we got chocolate powder for my party or not. I didn't care if we went to live in a new flat with a refrigerator or not. "The trouble with Dougie," said my cousin Pat, dreaming still of her Louisiana clapboard house, "is he's got no imagination." Well, I didn't care if I had imagination or not either. The thing that was awful was that Lou had started to care so much about everything, she seemed deranged. And I cared about that. I wanted her to be like she'd been when she'd won the solitary egg—contented.

Our pre-fab garden looked neat on Cup Day. We'd stuck in the shearings from a conifer hedge in my park, to look like a new little conifer hedge. We took down our washing line. Mr. Dowdswell let me borrow the edging shears to straighten up the grass. It wasn't bad. The adjudicator smiled at Lou's new home perm and said, "Very nice. Congratulations." Under the perm, her malaria was still raging away. "It means a lot to us," she said, in a choked voice. And the adjudicator took off his look of admiration and put on a look of pity and I knew we hadn't won.

"We haven't won, Louie," I told her.

"You know nothing about anything, Douglas," she told me back. Which, in a way, was true.

Wedderburn Wicklens gave me forty Senior Service cigarettes on the day of my birthday. I didn't smoke, so I gave them to Willou, who did. I thought how odd it was that Wed hadn't noticed I didn't smoke. But there were a lot of things Wed didn't notice, like for instance, he quite often called Patricia "Candice." "If you call me Candice again, I'll kill you!" she once told him. But this threat of death didn't seem to do the trick. Half way through my eighteenth birthday meal, a huge belch rumbled up out of his stomach and he said quickly: "Didn't hear that, did you, Candy honey?" "Who's Candy?" asked Willou

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simultaneously. Patricia slammed down her knife and fork and ran out into the hot night falling. Pepino stood up. Beside my gypsy Aunt If, he looked like a little yellow duck. "*You*!" he yelled. "You mind! You Yanki-panki!" And then he sat down again and Wed got up and wandered lazily out to Patricia.

We were eating pork ribs, for which Pepino had paid four pairs of nylons. Our fingers and chins were mucky and red from Lou's sauce of boiled tomatoes. Wed told us we should call this meal *spare*ribs and Will guffawed with derision. "Typical American!" he said, "call everything superfluous!" We picked the last shreds of meat from the ribs and washed these pickings down with beer. Lou had got her chocolate powder and her egg powder and on the afternoon she was told the winner of the Queen Mary Gardening Cup lived in Camberwell, she cried away her hopes into an enormous cake. She wrote (she hadn't got a fantastic imagination either) D 18 on the top with angelica she'd bought before the war. It made me uneasy. I thought, I'm glad she couldn't tattoo it onto me.

Knacky Mick never came to my birthday party, he was too ill. I saved him some cake. I thought, I've only got one friend and that's Knacky Mick and he's going to snuff it. I felt a bit like crying, but Lou and Will had their eye on me. Full of beer, they said, "This is a new start, Dougie. This is your chance to start again." I started to say I was perfectly content as I was, but nobody was actually listening. Will and Lou and Peppy and If had turned away from me and were lighting up the Senior Service I'd given them and talking about their chances of being rehoused, in Peppy's case in Brixton jail and in Willou's case in William Petrie Buildings, the lotteried flats with fridges and radiators. I looked round to see what was happening to Pat and Wed and I saw them kissing by the conifer hedge. I unwrapped the bobble hat Lou had knitted for my birthday present and put it on. The thought that Lou's fingers had fashioned every one of the stitches that went round and round my head made me feel very warm and happy. "Just look at him!" she said a while later, blowing smoke at Peppy, "*Honestly*!"

On the morning of the housing lottery, Lou couldn't face cooking barracuda, so we had bread and jam for breakfast. Will turned on the Home Service to calm his wife's beating heart. I left as early as I could to walk to my park and it was a beau-

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tiful morning, still and shiny and the smell of the park in summer was as fantastic to me as the smell of the Majestic Cinema was to Lou. A consignment of bedding geraniums had arrived, and I started to dig over the bed where they'd go in. I tried not to think about 879, or about Lou waiting with thousands of other women to hear the numbers called out. There were fifty-one flats in William Petrie Buildings and at least twenty times that number of applicants. Mr. Dowdswell came by to look at the geraniums. "Good work, Douglas," he said approvingly, and then tapped my bending back and said in his confidential stammer, "No more bla . . . no more yer bloody barley next year, thank Ga . . . thank God!" "Hooray, Sir," I answered.

When I got home, Lou was resting and Will was mushing up the barracuda we hadn't eaten for breakfast. "Don't disturb your mother," said Will.

"We didn't get one, did we?" I said.

"No," said Will.

I went to wash my hands at the sink. Outside, the stuck-in conifers were going brown.

"Never mind," I said.

"869 was lucky," said Will, "and 849 and 859, but not 879. Shame we had the 7."

I stared at Will and then beyond him to the bedroom where Lou was lying in the aftermath of her malaria. *Willou*. 8 and 9. Without me, they would have got lucky. I was the 7 alright. I'd made them lose.

That August Knacky Mick died and I applied for a job at the hospital where I'd visited him and where I've been now all my life. I told Willou this was my new start, and they were proud of me. But my last day at the park was one of the saddest things I can remember. They'd harvested the barley. I sat in the sunshine, staring at all the litter left among the stubble and thinking about my country.

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4.

The beginning of June was hot. I took a journey and, of course, everything was ~~different and strange~~. When you travel your first discovery is that ~~somehow~~ you ~~no longer~~ exist. The phlox bloomed in its faded purples; on the hillside, phallic pines. Foreigners in the arcades, in the ~~little~~ trashier shops. A steamy haze blurred the lines of the hills. A dirty, exhausting sky. Already, ~~it seemed~~, the summer was passing away. Soon the boats would be gathered in, ferries roped to the dock.

I ~~was~~ looking for the fosselized, for something-- persons and places thick and encrusted with final shape; instead there are many, many minnows, wildly swimming, trembling, vigilant to escape the net.

Kentucky-- that ~~was~~ certainly ~~always~~ part of it. My mother lived as a girl in so many North Carolina towns they are confused in my mind. Raleigh and Charlotte. ~~Those two I remember.~~ She hardly knew her own parents; they died quickly as people did then of whatever was in the air-- pneumonia, diphtheria, tuberculosis. I never knew a person so indifferent to the past. It was as if she didn't know who she was, ~~in some sense~~. She had brothers and sisters and was raised by them, passing their names down to us. I met one of her sisters when I was a child. She ran a hotel in Asheville, North Carolina.

Her face, my mother's, is not quite clear to me. A boneless, soft prettiness, with small brown eyes and the scarcest of eyebrows, darkened with a lead pencil. ~~Not a face easy to describe.~~

1962

Dearest M: Here I am back in New York, on 67th Street in a high steep place with long, dirty windows. ~~It is quite nice, but~~ In the late

An Elizabeth Hardwick manuscript page from her novel *Sleepless Nights*.

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The Art of Fiction LXXXVII
Elizabeth Hardwick

Elizabeth Hardwick left her hometown of Lexington, Kentucky to attend graduate school at Columbia University in the 1940s, and has lived mostly in New York ever since. In addition to her long association with Partisan Review, *she is founder and advisory editor of* The New York Review of Books, *the author of three novels,* The Ghostly Lover *(1945),* The Simple Truth *(1955),* Sleepless Nights *(1979), the editor of* The Selected Letters of William James *(1961), and has published three collections of essays,* Seduction and Betrayal: Women and Literature *(1974),* A View of My Own: Essays in

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Literature and Society *(1980), and, most recently,* Bartleby in Manhattan and Other Essays *(1983).*

Hardwick lives on the West Side of Manhattan, on a quiet street near enough to Central Park to have heard the crowds and speakers at the great political demonstrations in Sheep's Meadow. Her apartment is light and spacious. "Like modern architecture," she says, "it looks much better in photographs." The building was designed for artists, and the living room is dominated by a large studio window. Behind the enormous plants and the free-standing tiles, one can see a comforting fixture of urban life: a fire escape.

Her home is clearly that of a writer constantly at work, and strewn throughout is a lifetime's accumulation of furniture, objects, paintings, posters, photographs, records, heirlooms, and countless books. On either side of the living room are more books: ceiling-high shelves of histories, fiction, and poetry. It is a working library, accumulated with her late husband, the poet Robert Lowell. The daily effort to keep a large library in order has made Hardwick favor paperbacks, preferably those lightweight and storable ones that can be whipped out on a bus or an airplane—non-smoking section—without too much fuss.

Just as there are books everywhere that indicate the life of the mind, so one frequently comes upon notebooks and notepads on the coffee table, on the dining room table, things in which she has jotted down lines, questions, ideas. The typewriter goes from room to room, one day upstairs in her study, the next morning downstairs. And then there are the manuscripts from former as well as current students from her various writing classes, which she will read and comment on extensively.

This interview took place in her home, where she occasionally puttered, setting stray books in their places as we talked.

INTERVIEWER

I have the feeling you don't like to talk about yourself, at least not in a formal way.

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ELIZABETH HARDWICK

Well, I do a lot of talking and the "I" is not often absent. In general I'd rather talk about other people. Gossip, or as we gossips like to say, character analysis.

INTERVIEWER

Sleepless Nights is reticent, perhaps, but it certainly has the tone of lived experience, of a kind of autobiography.

HARDWICK

I guess so. After all, I wrote it in the first person and used my own name, Elizabeth. Not very confessional, however. And not entirely taken from life, rather less than the reader might think.

INTERVIEWER

Many of the essays in *Seduction and Betrayal* have an oddly personal tone. The stress on certain parts of the texts shows that you have dug things out in an unusual, somehow urgent manner, as if you had lived them. I'm thinking of the Jane Carlyle essay and your way of looking at Ibsen's *Rosmersholm.*

HARDWICK

Jane Carlyle was real, but of course I didn't *really* know her, as the saying goes. The people in *Rosmersholm* are figures of Ibsen's imagination.

INTERVIEWER

What is the reason for your deep attraction to Ibsen?

HARDWICK

I don't know that I have a deep attraction for Ibsen. Sometimes I think he's an awful dolt . . . wooden, and in certain plays stolidly grandiose like the mountains that are such an unfortunate apotheosis in *Little Eyolf* and *When We Dead Awaken*. I don't like the poetic Ibsen, but I have found myself deeply engaged by the beauty, you might call it, of the old Ibsen domestic misery.

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INTERVIEWER

Someone once said to me that he was fascinated by your essay on *Rosmersholm*, about the triangle between the man and the two women. But when he went to the play he couldn't always find your ideas there on the page. What do you make of that?

HARDWICK

I certainly hope what I said is on Ibsen's pages and of course I think it is. Still, you're not writing an essay to give a resumé of the plots. You choose to write because you think you have something fresh to say on a topic. That is, if you're writing from choice and not just as a journeyman doing a job. Perhaps it's true that in reading certain works, not all works, I do sometimes enter a sort of hallucinatory state and I think I see undercurrents and light in dark places about the imagined emotions and actions. This often stimulates me to write, particularly about novels. Of course the text is the object, the given, and the period is not often one's own and if there is anything detestable it is the looking at fictional characters as if they were your friends. I have found that horrible inclination among students, more and more so. They don't know the difference between calling a character "silly" and realizing that they are reading a masterpiece of created, located, visionary "silliness." I think every reader and critic falls into a hallucinatory state and that is as true of the technocrats, the deconstructionists, as of any others.

INTERVIEWER

When you say "hallucinatory state," are you trying to describe how the creative process works for you?

HARDWICK

Perhaps "hallucinatory" is too strong or too mysterious a word. What I meant was that in reading books and planning to write about them, or maybe just in reading certain books, you begin to see all sorts of not quite expressed things, to make connections, sometimes to feel you have discovered or felt certain things the author may not have been entirely conscious of. It's a sort

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of creative or "possessed" reading and that is why I think even the most technical of critics do the same thing, by their means making quite mysterious discoveries. But as I said, the text is always the first thing. It has the real claim on you, of course.

INTERVIEWER

Do you fall into this state when you write fiction?

HARDWICK

I don't fall into a state at all. I just meant to describe something happening in the brain when it is stimulated by reading imaginative works. As for writing fiction, well, you don't have any primary text, of course. You have to create that, and yet the struggle seems to be to uncover things by language, to find out what you mean and feel by the sheer effort of writing it down. By expression you discover what you wish to express or what can be expressed, by you. Things that are vague in the beginning have to be made concrete. Often, what you thought was the creative idea ahead of you vanishes or becomes something else.

INTERVIEWER

What comes first in sitting down to write—I guess we're talking about fiction. Is it a concept? Is it a character? Is it a scene?

HARDWICK

It takes many things to make a work of fiction, but I suppose it is true that there is a kind of starting point in the mind, a point that may be different for each piece of work. Sometimes I have had the impulse to begin fiction from a single line I had in my head.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example?

HARDWICK

I remember that I started writing *Sleepless Nights* because of a single line. The line was: "Now I will start my novel, but I don't know whether to call myself I or she."

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INTERVIEWER

Was this a first line, a beginning line?

HARDWICK

No, it was to be the last line of the opening scene. I published the first chapter in *The New York Review of Books* and the line was the ending of the scene. But as I went on to write the book, I did call the narrator "I" and so I deleted the line from the final text. Some readers noticed the omission and asked me about it. I think now that I could have retained the line and just gone on with the narrative "I," as if to say I had made the decision.

INTERVIEWER

What did the line mean to you? That you knew it was going to be an autobiographical novel?

HARDWICK

Of course that line is not a theme. It is a wondering aloud about structure and also meant to indicate that sometimes in novels the use of the third person is really a disguise for the first person. I mean certain fictions have the strong feeling of autobiography even if they are written in the third person. It's something a sensitive reader can feel.

INTERVIEWER

When you started *Sleepless Nights* did you know anything more than that it would be an autobiographical novel?

HARDWICK

I wrote the first scene, starting with a description of a place and then going on to the writing of an imaginary letter to "Dearest M." The opening scene dominated the book, set the tone, and then, of course, as I worked on it I had to write the book—that is, create scenes, encounters, and so on.

INTERVIEWER

Has the impulse for writing ever started from a last line?

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HARDWICK

Maybe not a last line, but a notion of the ending can be a useful stimulus.

INTERVIEWER

Does the opening paragraph mostly concern mood? Or plot? Or character?

HARDWICK

I don't have many plots and perhaps as a justification I sometimes think: if I want a plot I'll watch "Dallas." I think it's mood. No, I mean tone. Tone arrived at by language. I can't write a story or an essay until I can, by revision after revision, get the opening tone right. Sometimes it seems to take forever, but when I have it I can usually go on. It's a matter of the voice, how you are going to approach the task at hand. It's all language and rhythm and the establishment of the relation to the material, of who's speaking, not speaking as a person exactly, but as a mind, a sensibility.

INTERVIEWER

Can you always arrive at the tone you want?

HARDWICK

No, I can't, and when that happens I put the work aside. But I've noticed that the effort is always useful. I mostly use the things, sometime, somewhere, that I've abandoned. They've been worked on, exist, if only in a few pages—and the old yellow pages flaking away in a drawer turn out to be useful. I don't know what I'm thinking about a particular thing until I have some kind of draft. It's the actual execution that tells me what I want to say, what I always wanted to say when I started.

INTERVIEWER

What do you mean when you say that you don't know what is in your mind until you've written it?

HARDWICK

I'm not sure I understand the process of writing. There is,

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I'm sure, something strange about imaginative concentration. The brain slowly begins to function in a different way, to make mysterious connections. Say, it is Monday, and you write a very bad draft, but if you keep trying, on Friday, words, phrases, appear almost unexpectedly. I don't know why you can't do it on Monday, or why I can't. I'm the same person, no smarter, I have nothing more at hand.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find that unique with yourself?

HARDWICK

I think it's true of a lot of writers. It's one of the things writing students don't understand. They write a first draft and are quite disappointed, or often *should* be disappointed. They don't understand that they have merely begun, and that they may be merely beginning even in the second or third draft. For the great expansive prose writers, obviously this isn't the case. Somehow everything is available to them all the time. That's the real prose gift.

INTERVIEWER

What writers have had this gift?

HARDWICK

Tolstoy, Dickens, Henry James. All the greatly productive geniuses. I am very struck by the revisions of Henry James. They seem to me always interesting, but in the end quite minor—changes in a few words, shiftings. The powers of concentration the great writers show are extraordinarily moving.

INTERVIEWER

Are there any tricks or devices that seem to help?

HARDWICK

For me, writing has not become easier after all these years. It is harder—perhaps because of the standards you set for your work. I suppose you have, by effort, a greater command than

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you imagine. The fact that writing remains so difficult is what puzzles.

INTERVIEWER

What is it about the writing process that gives you the most pleasure?

HARDWICK

The revision. That's what I like, working on a page or a scene.

INTERVIEWER

What about help with revision? Did Cal [Robert Lowell] ever help you with the books or essays?

HARDWICK

Not really. His suggestions were always wonderful, but so general I couldn't make much use of them. And he was always revising his own work and showing it to me and to his friends. He was revising something from the moment he got up until the moment he went to sleep, if only in his head, and so much of the time with him when you were alone was spent reading and talking to him about what he had done during the day. And that was very pleasant to me, it was always very interesting reading it, and it wasn't just to me that he read his work in progress. I have noticed the same method with other poets. I can remember having dear old I. A. Richards to dinner, and we weren't sitting there very long before the sheaf came out of the pocket of his coat, and he read his new poems, and that was wonderful.

INTERVIEWER

You didn't offer your own work in progress in that way?

HARDWICK

Well, it was a little bit different, you know, prose being longer, and it's not quite the same as seeing a quatrain at the end of the day. Cal did read my work, of course, and he was very encouraging and nice about it, and all of that, but it wasn't the same as going over each little part.

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INTERVIEWER

How about the intellectual content of the essays?

HARDWICK

I must say he often looked discomfited on that score. Sometimes he thought I was too snippy.

INTERVIEWER

Really? He'd ask you to de-snip?

HARDWICK

I remember in one of the first issues of *The New York Review* I wrote a piece about a biographical book on Robert Frost. It was more or less mild, but Cal was quite annoyed—annoyed for a short time. I noticed in Randall Jarrell's letters that he gave a bit of approval to my Frost essay and so I said to myself, "O.K., Cal?" On the whole, Cal was encouraging. He liked women writers and I don't think he ever had a true interest in a woman who wasn't a writer—an odd turn-on indeed and one I've noticed not greatly shared. Women writers don't tend to be passive vessels or wives, saying, "Oh, that's good, dear."

INTERVIEWER

Was it stimulating to your own work to be involved in that sort of tremendously volatile writer's atmosphere?

HARDWICK

What do you mean "involved"? That would have been my atmosphere no matter what. Literature was always my passion. I do remember however that I was once asked if I had felt overpowered by Lowell's work, meaning, I guess, if it overpowered my own. I said, "Well, I should hope so." I had great regard and admiration for it. Learned from him and from it, got pleasure from it.

INTERVIEWER

If you could say what was particularly enriching about your life with Lowell, what would it be? The spirit of it, or technical literary matters?

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HARDWICK

The quality of his mind—quite the most thrilling I've known. Once at dinner something came up about what people you have known whom you considered to be geniuses. Mary McCarthy was there. We all thought for a while and Mary and I came up with the same two names. Cal and Hannah Arendt.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think is the essential piece of equipment a writer must have?

HARDWICK

Well, you know, there is such a thing as talent, a bit of talent. I'll leave it at that.

INTERVIEWER

Given the talent, should writers be concerned with the issues of the times . . . things like that?

HARDWICK

Not necessarily. Of course they usually *are* concerned with the issues of the times in some way. The variety and strangeness of literary works is amazing. You wake up one morning and someone's done something a little bit new, something fresh and genuine, a new accent, quality of experience, way of composing and structuring. That's very beautiful to me. I am very happy when I see an interesting, gifted struggle with fictional form. I know as well as the next person that many fine things use traditional methods of narration and there will be, naturally, much that is traditional in those who experiment. Here I am not talking about a great innovator like Joyce, but about lesser struggles. When I open a new work of fiction I like to notice the way it is constructed, to learn something from it. Like Milan Kundera's latest novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. The narrator comes in and out and yet the form shifts to stories, to feelings, actions the narrator could not have known. I think it is done successfully there. There is always the problem of who is seeing, who is thinking. I am excited when I feel the author is trying to cope with this dilemma—and it is often a compositional dilemma.

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INTERVIEWER

Can talent be taught?

HARDWICK

Perhaps not. I try to uncover what talent may be hiding by teaching creative reading. That turns out to be rather difficult—to read as a writer reads. I guess that is what I meant by reading in a "hallucinatory state." Not the perfect phrase.

INTERVIEWER

What state of mind are you in when the writing seems to be moving along?

HARDWICK

I don't know. I don't know why I am so helplessly led to condensation in both my fiction and my essays. Some people find it hard to follow my meaning because I don't spell it out, not entirely. My writing is simple but I like to be sort of emphatic and then let it go. I remember when I was writing exams in school I'd be the first one finished. All these people writing away. As I look back on it I think I didn't want to tell the teacher what he already knew, but to try to get at things from an angle—nothing very grand, just a little twist. That little twist always got me an *A minus.*

INTERVIEWER

In your first novel, *The Ghostly Lover*, and in your early short stories that appeared in various magazines, you seemed to be a Southern writer. And then you became much more identified with New York. Why is that?

HARDWICK

I don't like to quote myself, but since one doesn't have many ideas—or perhaps just *I* don't have many ideas—I will have to quote what I said in a Southern literature discussion. That is, that being a Southern writer is a decision, not a fate. Naturally, I love the best Southern writing and spent my youth, up through the university, in Lexington, Kentucky, a very beau-

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tiful and interesting place. But I think a critical, defining moment came into my life one summer. I had received a fellowship to L.S.U., a magical place then, with the *Southern Review* and all sorts of brilliant writers around. And then in August I suddenly didn't want to go and instead I went to Columbia . . . and without a fellowship. I'm amazed I was accepted.

INTERVIEWER

And then what happened?

HARDWICK

Well, ever trendy, I decided I had to specialize in the seventeenth century because that was the time of the metaphysical poets, John Donne and so on. That was the hot period. After the first seminar I woke up and thought, I don't even know when the seventeenth century was! Of course I rushed out and read some books fast, filling in my literary knowledge, which began in 1920. It was all rather fun. It was New York and even back home I had been reading *Partisan Review* and had already been a communist and an ex-communist, left variety, before I got here.

INTERVIEWER

Is that true?

HARDWICK

Yes, I wouldn't say it otherwise.

INTERVIEWER

I remember you once said that your dream when you were young was to be a Jewish intellectual.

HARDWICK

I said that as a joke, but it was more or less true. What I meant was the enlightenment, a certain deracination which I value, an angular vision, love of learning, cosmopolitanism, a word that practically means Jewish in Soviet lexicography. Right now, I'd say my remark depended upon which Jewish

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intellectual. I am not sympathetic with the political attitudes of certain members of the New Right who happen to be Jewish intellectuals, and less sympathetic to the Christian Right, most of whom are scarcely to be called intellectuals at all. I don't like the chauvinism, the militarism, the smugness, and the Social Darwinism, that jargon term, the support of Ronald Reagan . . . and all the rest.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about the religiosity of the New Right, the fundamentalists, and Reagan's courting of them?

HARDWICK

I think the fundamentalists' and Reagan's use of religion is an appalling blasphemy. The idea that God wants a strong America. Many Americans will naturally want a strong America, but I don't know that God is in agreement. I hadn't thought of Him as being a patriot . . . I hadn't thought of Him as in a state of desire except against idolators, and as we know from the Old Testament it is very easy to sink into idolatry, which a good deal of the flag-waving is just now. As for evangelizing Christians, their vulgarization of the scriptures surpasses belief, their incredible assumption of Jesus as a pal in the cheering stand.

INTERVIEWER

Are you interested in religion?

HARDWICK

Of course, even though I'm a nonbeliever. I was brought up a Presbyterian. I still feel an attachment to the Presbyterian Church where I know all the hymns and where I first felt the beauty and resonance of the scriptures. Actually, when I lived in New England I was surprised to find that the denomination hardly existed there—not that if it had I was ready to put on my pumps and trot off every Sunday. The Scotch and the Scotch-Irish, which my mother's family were, mostly migrated to the upper South, especially to North Carolina, where she grew up.

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In New England you're supposed to think that the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists are more or less the same, but my seventeenth-century studies told me otherwise.

INTERVIEWER

What are you trying to say about religion . . . as a nonbeliever?

HARDWICK

I don't know. It may sound glib but I suppose for me religion is a vast, valuable museum . . . and, yes, I know the treasures of it are not the same as going to the Louvre . . . although now that I think of it, there's a good deal of overlapping, isn't there?

INTERVIEWER

Do you see any literary influence of the New Right, of the neo-conservatives?

HARDWICK

I don't know about influence, but I do see that, as always, cultural and political attitudes swim along in the same bloodstream. Defense of American values, as these notions are called, can have a wide swing, picking up all sorts of things like homosexuals or fast women who are not doing their bit for the preservation of the American family. . . . For myself, I like many homosexuals and many self-absorbed, childless women, and I can't see them as a menace to the republic, or even to Republicans. Some of my best friends . . . and so on.

INTERVIEWER

Do you find any conservative attitudes specifically literary?

HARDWICK

I notice the creeping development of what I would call the Conservative Realism, because it brings to mind the intellectual follies of Social Realism. You get the idea that disaffected, even laid-back, attitudes in fiction, certain choices of despairing subject matter, are contemptible in a writer residing in the full-

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ness of the United States. Certain tones of reflection are seen as a snide assault on the Free World.

INTERVIEWER

For instance?

HARDWICK

It's a rich field but I happen to remember a particular review of Ann Beattie's stories which said, "They seem treacherous to the energy and heroic idealism that are her country's saving grace." Now, I ask you! That appeared in *Partisan Review*, which is not a neo-con magazine, but "bore from within," as we used to say. Also, there is Norman Podhoretz's consignment of Henry *Adams and all his works to the ash heap of history.*

INTERVIEWER

You have taught a great deal. Why do you think many writers resent teaching? Do you agree with them that it interferes in subtle ways with their own writing?

HARDWICK

Nothing interferes with my own writing except my often irresolute character and of course the limitations of my talent.

INTERVIEWER

You seem rather accommodating and modest and yet you can be aggressive in your writing.

HARDWICK

And not only in my writing, alas. I don't like aggressiveness and I detest anger, a quality some feminists and many psychiatrists think one should cultivate in order to express the self. I was astonished by the number of obituaries of Lillian Hellman that spoke with reverence of her anger. I don't see anger as an emotion to be cultivated and, in any case, it is not in short supply.

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INTERVIEWER

Can you talk a bit about your background—school, childhood.

HARDWICK

Childhood? I came from a large family and many of my brothers and sisters were older than I, and I learned from them since they were, most of them, going to college when I was growing up. It was not an intellectual atmosphere, but a stimulating one. Like all writers I know of, the early days were dominated by a love of reading, just reading, like eating, anything around. It was not until I got to the University of Kentucky that the range of books was quite suddenly and very excitingly extended. I had some extraordinary teachers, some of the refugees from Europe, and very smart friends, some clever and "know-it-all" from New York, which appealed to me, and some very bright and lovable from just down home. I was not aware of any intellectual deprivation and there was none in the general sense. But aren't we all self-educated, and of course our self-education never includes all of the things we would like to know or need to know.

INTERVIEWER

And your career?

HARDWICK

Is it a career? I mean is that the right word for being a writer? It's a strange life. . . . The most peculiar thing about it is that when you write you are required to think and having once noticed that, you observe how little the rest of life makes such a demand. It demands something else, many things of course, but not sitting and thinking the way you must when you write, when you revise, when you abandon, start over, refine, all of that. About my own efforts, I sometimes feel I can say, well, I'm doing my best, or have done my best. That is not the supreme thrill for one who has spent her life reading superb writings of all kinds. But I am happy to do what I can.

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INTERVIEWER

Some young women I know think of you as very fortunate to have your place in things, your work and so forth.

HARDWICK

As I have grown older I see myself as fortunate in many ways. It is fortunate to have had all my life this passion for studying and enjoying literature and for trying to add a bit to it as interestingly as I can. This passion has given me much joy, it has given me friends who care for the same things, it has given me employment, escape from boredom, everything. The greatest gift is the passion for reading. It is cheap, it consoles, it distracts, it excites, it gives you knowledge of the world and experience of a wide kind. It is a moral illumination.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think there are special difficulties in being a woman writer?

HARDWICK

Woman writer? A bit of a crunch trying to get those two words together . . . I guess I would say no special difficulty, just the usual difficulties of the arts.

INTERVIEWER

So you feel it's the same for men and women?

HARDWICK

Nothing is the same for men and women.

INTERVIEWER

Not the same and . . . what else?

HARDWICK

Actually I have noticed lately a good deal of bitchiness with regard to certain women writers. Susan Sontag, for instance. The public scourging she was subjected to from all sides seemed to me disgusting and unworthy.

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A snapshot of Elizabeth Hardwick, taken at Columbia University in 1944. She was a graduate student there at the time.

Elizabeth Hardwick and Robert Lowell, shortly after their marriage. They are seated on the steps of F.W. Dupee's house in Red Bank, New Jersey, in 1949.

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INTERVIEWER

What "public scourging" are you referring to?

HARDWICK

A sort of extended flap about a speech she made at a public gathering in which she spoke of communism as "fascism with a human face" and other matters. This was followed by attacks from the left and the right that seemed to go on for months. She was also scorned for writing so much about Europeans, the French particularly. I think her being a woman, a learned one, a *femme savante*, had something to do with it. As an intellectual with very special gifts and attitudes, it was somehow felt that this made her a proper object for ridicule of a coarse kind. I believe the tone was different because she was seen as a very smart, intellectually ambitious woman.

INTERVIEWER

Intellectual woman? Aren't you yourself one of them?

HARDWICK

Let me quote from *The Land of Ulro*, the latest book by the poet Czeslaw Milosz. "The history of my stupidity would fill many volumes."

INTERVIEWER

But, these days, women writers fare about as well as men, don't they?

HARDWICK

In general, of course. Just as many atrocious women writers are laughing all the way to the bank as men. But I do feel there is an inclination to punish women of what you might call presumption of one kind or another.

INTERVIEWER

Which women?

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HARDWICK

For instance, Joan Didion and Renata Adler. I haven't found two books recently that have seemed to me more imaginative, intelligent, and original than *Democracy* and *Pitch Dark*. In the reviews, at least in many of them, I felt a note of contempt and superiority, often expressed in a lame, inept effort to parody . . . And when you think of what the big guys have been turning out! And the ponderous, quaking reviews they receive!

INTERVIEWER

You mean they're getting away with something? What big guys?

HARDWICK

Never mind, never mind.

INTERVIEWER

What about reviewers today?

HARDWICK

I notice that many of them in very important places haven't written anything except their reviews, their quick, short reviews, composed with an air of easy authority. For the most part, I think the authority should be in some way earned. Well, they pass the night perhaps. . . . When a real writer discusses literature and culture you will notice a difference in style, in carefulness, and you will actually find ideas, illuminations, oddities and not merely yes-or-no opinions.

INTERVIEWER

Are you saying it's not entirely fair for a critic to do nothing but practice criticism?

HARDWICK

No. Let me say that criticism, analysis, reflection is a natural response to the existence in the world of works of art. It is an

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honorable and even an exalted endeavor. Without it, works of art would appear in a vacuum, as if they had no relation to the minds experiencing them. It would be a dismal, unthinkable world with these shooting stars arousing no comment, leaving no trace. But it is the mind of the critic, somehow, the establishment of his own thought and values, that counts; and that establishment is the authority of the voice, whether it comes from creative work in the arts or creative work in criticism. When I read a review, a mere short review, I am more interested at first in who is doing the reviewing than in the work under discussion. The name, what is attached to it by previous work, by serious thought, tells me whether it is likely to have any meaning or value for me. It is not a question of right or wrong specific opinions, but of the quality of the mind.

INTERVIEWER

You have been criticized for your review of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* in *A View of My Own*. Would you still stand on that?

HARDWICK

No, I wouldn't. It's a wonderful, remarkable book. Nothing that has come since on the matter of women compares to it. When I wrote my comments I was thinking of existentialism and the idea that one can choose and not be dominated by the given . . . something like that. And of course thinking back on my remarks I see how much has changed since the 1950s, especially in the manner of life for women. You are still weaker than men in muscular force, but can sleep in the streets if you like, even, alas, if that is the only place you have to sleep, and go to Arabia in your jeans and knapsack . . . and much, much more.

INTERVIEWER

I was present a few years ago at a panel discussion where you were asked who was the greatest American female novelist, and you said Henry James. I had the feeling you meant something serious about that.

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HARDWICK

Such remarks don't bear scrutiny. Did I actually say that? I do remember saying once that maybe the greatest female novelist in English was Constance Garnett. Sometimes I try to lighten the gloom of discussions but I notice that no one laughs. Instead you see a few people writing down the name.

INTERVIEWER

I have the impression that in your most recent stories about New York—"The Bookseller," "Back Issues," and "On the Eve"—you are using the city almost as a text and the characters you have chosen are instruments of decoding. Or is that too mechanistic for the way you place these people, catch the start and stop of their lives?

HARDWICK

I don't know about decoding New York. It's a large place, oh yes. And it's a place, isn't it? Still very much a place, or so I think. There's not much good feeling about New York, in spite of the T-shirts and the "Big Apple" and so on.

INTERVIEWER

You seem to be faithful to it.

HARDWICK

I like cities, big cities and even medium-sized cities. If I were traveling about America, I'd always want to spend the night downtown. If I could still find downtown. Yes, I'm faithful to New York, one might say. It's ours, our country's, our great metropolis. Many people no longer like the melting pot notion and seem to feel there are too many poor trying to be melted in the great vat. Of course everybody hates poor people. They're a damned nuisance. Always wanting something. Perhaps they used to be a part of the scheme of things, a part of nature, always with us and so on. But you might say they don't fit in anymore, or so I think many people see it.

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INTERVIEWER

In a talk at the Columbia School of Architecture, you spoke of the increasing "Bombayism" of New York. What did you mean?

HARDWICK

Well, Bombay is called the New York of India, and I guess New York is becoming the Bombay of the U.S. What I had in mind was the increasing separation of the classes, the gap, as of another species. The streets filled with Untouchables. Just look the other way and move on. The intractable, milling others for whom you have no solution. Roll up the window of the limo. Step aside and into a cab . . . New York is a city of the rich and the poor. It's a terrible place for the middle classes, and for what you would call the workers who run the elevators, build the buildings, clerk in the stores, cook in the restaurants. Manhattan is not for them. They get on the subway and go to the other boroughs at night. So the culture of the city, the vitality, the promise is more and more restricted. There's not a foot of living space and what there is is so overpriced as to raise the dead. That is a violation of the contract of the city as we knew it. When you think of old New York, I, at least, don't think of the patricians, but of the Lower East Side and Harlem—both are gone, wiped out as images of promise, change, relief from the old country or from the South or whatever, as places that created styles like the jazziness of Harlem that captivated Europe and the experience of generations of immigrants.

INTERVIEWER

Are you trying to express this in the fiction you're working on?

HARDWICK

I know that I can't. I realize how narrow my knowledge of the city is. I can't take it in as a whole. I feel I know less about it than when I first came here, but I very much like to think about it and care about it. I am using it as the landscape of my fiction just now, but whether I can make an image of the city itself I don't know. Everything in the stories I have done

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recently is imaginary. I even had to go to the Public Library and look around.

INTERVIEWER

You mean in "Back Issues" where you met the Greek?

HARDWICK

I've never met a Greek in my life.

INTERVIEWER

The shop in "The Bookseller" reminded me of every second-hand shop I've seen in Manhattan.

HARDWICK

I hardly ever go into a bookstore because, instead of buying, I would like to give away about five thousand of my seven thousand books, which are weighing on me like some suffocating plague.

INTERVIEWER

I'll take them.

HARDWICK

They're yours. Bring your van. I can't find those I want, thousands have not been dusted in years. I miss the time when I used to go into the old second-hand shops, looking for the modern classics. What a pleasure that was, not having them and finding them. And then to get volumes of history, all the odd tomes.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the state of publishing just now?

HARDWICK

Insofar as making money is concerned it is better now not to be an *author* when you write a book. Being a writer just mucks it up. I see that when I look at the best-seller list of books by movie stars and doctors, although some *literateurs* make money,

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fortunately. But of course the best-seller list, poor old thrashed dog, is not what things are about. Otherwise I don't think publishing changes much. It's still sort of a running faucet and words and pages pour out. I doubt that many worthwhile books don't make it to the printing presses. I like sometimes to think otherwise.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you like to think otherwise?

HARDWICK

Just the idea that something brilliant and unacceptable, something too quirky and original is being created. In general I guess I feel that what we have is what is there.

INTERVIEWER

Do you feel that the European novel, the Latin American novel, the African novel, the dissident writings are superior to what is being done here?

HARDWICK

Superior, who knows? In some ways, I suppose we are left behind in the great themes that arrive from the feeling of displacement and loss. V.S. Naipaul said something about English fiction—it's all tea parties or something like that. We seem to have divorce and adultery and being young with your parents and being a bit gay here and there, or quite gay—can I still say queer?—and drinking beer at the truck stop instead of getting ahead. But we live in a world of displaced, agonized talents who have lost country and language and family and whose condition represents so much of this century. The survival of those talents, the imaginative rendering of their experience is extraordinarily moving and large. Of course it's all in the telling. We are a protected country even though so many of us are whipped to a frenzy about the dangers around us and feel the best thing we can do for our citizens is to push them into a siege mentality. But meanwhile . . . meanwhile, you can be quite happy and make quite a good living crying havoc and getting

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out the siege vote. Let me say that I would not want our country overrun in order to create fiction and poetry. All I'm saying is that the introversion of our literature just now makes it narrower than the exile writing. But everyone knows that.

INTERVIEWER

Who are the readers?

HARDWICK

I don't know. It is thought that the present young generation doesn't know much about literature, hasn't read much . . . and yet a lot of the writing of the last decades is full of parodies, mimicry, learned references of a sort and readers seem to get it. I always wonder who buys the books. "100,000 in print" the ads say. Fifty thousand may have come from knowing that the first fifty thousand bought the book. That's okay. Especially if it's something of value. I don't think it's a good idea for writers to think too much about the publishing world. I sense in a good many books, even in books by the best writers, an anxiety about how it will do in the marketplace. You can feel it on the page, a sort of sweat of calculation. As if to say, well, it will be a few years before the next one and I had better be sure I don't let this chance to make some money pass by. But no more about publishing.

INTERVIEWER

Okay, no more about publishing. May I ask you how you feel about growing older?

HARDWICK

You can always ask. Or perhaps no one need ask. Just another piece of rotten luck. No, I haven't found anything good to say about it. Not a condition that can be recommended. Its only value is that it spares you the opposite, not growing older. People do cling to consciousness, and under the most dreadful circumstances. It shows you that it is all we have, doesn't it? Waking up, the first and the last privilege, waking up once more.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you think it is more painful for women than for men?

HARDWICK

More about women and men? About something so burdensome it doesn't seem valuable to make distinctions. Oh, the dear grave. I like what Gottfried Benn wrote, something like, "May I die in the spring when the ground is soft and easy to plough."

INTERVIEWER

I notice that you quote poets a lot.

HARDWICK

Well, you don't exactly quote prose I guess, although I often remember prose lines and sayings.

INTERVIEWER

Has the reading of poetry and the knowing of poets influenced your own style? Some have thought so.

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Elizabeth Hardwick and Robert Lowell with their daughter, Harriet, in Santa Fe, New Mexico in the late sixties.

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HARDWICK

I don't know. Certainly Cal had a great influence on every aspect of my life. In literary matters, his immense learning and love of literature were a constant magic for me. As an influence on my own writing, that is more difficult to figure out . . . Let me shift the subject a little. Maybe I was led to this by Cal's library, led to the prose written by poets. The poet's prose is one of my passions. I like the off-hand flashes, the absence of the lumber in the usual prose . . . the quickness, the deftness, confidence, and even the relief from spelling everything out, plank by plank.

INTERVIEWER

Can you give an example?

HARDWICK

Well, here is a beautiful sentence, just right, inspired, a bit of prose I've memorized. It is by Pasternak. It goes: "The beginning of April surprised Moscow in the white stupor of returning winter. On the seventh, it began to thaw for the second time, and on the fourteenth when Mayakovsky shot himself, not everyone had yet become accustomed to the novelty of spring." I love the rhythm of "the beginning of April . . . on the seventh . . . on the fourteenth" and the way the subject, Mayakovsky's suicide, is honored by the beauty of this introduction to the account. It's in *Safe Conduct*, Pasternak's autobiographical writing.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps this leads to the subject of biography. You had a review in *The New York Times* of a biography of Katherine Anne Porter. There you had some rough things to say about the present practice.

HARDWICK

Last summer I had a striking experience. On the same day I received two letters, written by different people, each saying she was writing a biography of an author recently dead, an au-

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thor not at all a household word. Two letters on the same day. I didn't know the author, but perhaps I'll merit a footnote in the book saying I did not know her. Or be thanked in the preface. Biography is a scrofulous cottage industry, done mostly by academics who get grants and have a good time going all over the place interviewing. How seldom it is that one has ever heard of the person writing the biography. What are the models, what are the qualifications? And it is not only the full-scale computer printout that these things are, but the books brought forth by lovers, friends from youth, cousins, whatever. I remember how horrified Dickens was when he met, in later life, the model for Dora in *David Copperfield.* Now Dora would hire a hack and write about Dickens. I have just read *Auden in Love* by Dorothy Farnan, a friend of Chester Kallman's. I quite disapprove of the impertinence and the celestial glow around herself and her intimacy. Both Auden and Chester would be *mute, motionless, aghast.* Such books diminish the celebrated object and aggrandize the biographer or memoirist. I understand from the reviews of a new book about Agee that the swarm and smarm of little "facts" degrade the memory most of us have of Agee. Think how sweet Trelawney now appears; and de Quincy's beautiful memories of the Lake Poets, candid indeed, are almost a valentine because there is some equity between the subject and the author. And serious, incomparable reflection.

INTERVIEWER

How do you feel about Ian Hamilton's biography of Lowell?

HARDWICK

Hamilton is very intelligent and a very fine writer. Still the book is composed along contemporary lines and there is too little of Hamilton in it since most of the stage is given to raw documentation. When I finished it, I was reminded of Sir Walter Raleigh's executioner, who said, "There is not another such head to be chopped off!"

INTERVIEWER

Are you working on any fiction now? A future novel?

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HARDWICK

Oh, yes. What are you working on? When one writer asks another that, he immediately apologizes, as if for a *gaffe* . . . I might say I'm working on working on a novel . . . I do hope I'll be writing a novel. I have some of it, but it is slow, of course, the writing. I hope not the work. Yes, I am writing fiction.

—**Darryl Pinckney**

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James Schuyler

A Few Days

are all we have. So count them as they pass. They pass too quickly
out of breath. Don't dwell on the grave which yawns for one and all.
Will you be buried in the yard? Sorry, it's against the law. You can only
lie in an authorized plot but you won't be there to know it, so why worry
about it? Here I am at my brother's house in western New York: I came
here yesterday on the Empire State Express, eight hours of boredom on the train.
A pretty blonde child sat next to me for a while. She had a winning smile,
but I couldn't talk to her, beyond, "What happened to your shoes?" "I put them under the seat." And
so she had. She pressed the button that released the seat back and sank
back like an old woman. Outside, the purple loosestrife bloomed in swathes
that turned the railway ditch and fields into a sunset-reflecting lake
And there was goldenrod and tattered Queen Anne's lace and the noble Hudson
on which just one sailboat sailed, red, billowing, on a weekday afternoon.
A tug towed some scows. Sandy red earth and cows, the calves like
big dogs. With Fresca and ham and cheese on a roll the eight hours somehow passed.
My sister-in-law met me at the Buffalo Central Station

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and drove me out to their house.
Hilde is just back from a visit home to Augsburg,
where she was born
not too long ago. She taught herself to speak English which
she does extremely well.
My mother now lives with them in the house my brother built
himself. She's old: almost eighty-nine
and her sight is failing. She has little to do but sit and
listen to the T.V. rumble.
When I came in she said, "I can't see you but I know your
voice."
"Some corner of a garden where the soul sinks down under
its own weight. . . ."
But this isn't about my family, although I wish it were. My
niece Peggy is at
camp in the Adirondacks so I am staying in her room.
It's essence of teenage
girl: soft lilac walls, colored photographs of rock stars,
nosegays of artificial flowers,
signs on the door: This Room is a DISASTER AREA, and
GARBAGEDUMP.
"Some ash can at the world's end. . . ." But this is not
my family's story, nor
is it Molly's: the coon hound pleading silently for table
scraps. The temperature
last night dipped into the forties: a record for August
14th. There is a German
down pouff on the bed and I was glad to wriggle under
it and sleep the sleep
of the just. Today is a perfection of blue: the leaves
go "lisp" in the breeze.
I wish I were a better traveler; I love new places, the
arrival in a station
after the ennui of a trip. On the train across the aisle
from me there was a young couple.
He read while she stroked the flank of his chest in a
circular motion, motherly,
covetous. They kissed. What is lovelier than young love?

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Will it only lead
to barren years of a sour marriage? They were perfect
together. I wish
them well. This coffee is cold. The eighteen-cup pot,
like most inventions,
doesn't work so well. A few days: how to celebrate them?
It's today I want
to memorialize but how can I? What is there to it?
Cold coffee and
a ham salad sandwich? A skinny peach tree holds no
peaches. Molly howls
at the children who come to the door. What did they
want? It's the wrong
time of year for Girl Scout cookies.
My mother can't find her hair net. She nurses a cup of
coffee substitute, since
her religion (Christian Science) forbids the use
of stimulants. On this
desk, a vase of dried blue flowers, a vase of artificial
roses, a bottle with
a dog for stopper, a lamp, two plush lions that hug
affectionately, a bright
red travel clock, a Remington Rand, my Olivetti, and
ashtray and the coffee cup.
Moonlight Serenade:

Moon, shine in my yard,
let the grass blades
cast shadows on themselves.
Harbinger of dreams,
let me sleep in your
eternal glow.

That was last night. Today, the color of a buttercup,
winds on the spool
of time, an opaque snapshot. Today is better than yesterday
which was too cold for
August. Still, it had its majesty of tumultuous cloud wrack.
Here and there a sun beam
struggled through. Like the picture in my grandmother's Bible

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of judgement day:
Rembrandtesque beams of spotlight through cloud cities on a desolate landscape. I
used to feel frightened when I saw that effect in the sky. The August coolness:
a winter's coming autumn feeling of it's time to pull our horns in and snuggle
down for winter. The radio, the anodyne of the lonely, speaks or rather sings:

I love you only
don't want to be lonely

delectable, deleterious trash. Three in the afternoon, when time stands still.
Is your watch right? Rest after labor doth greatly ease. There is no place to put
anything. These squandered minutes, hours, days. A few days, spend them riotously. There
is no occasion for riot. I haven't had a drink in years, begging a few glasses of
wine. I dream at night about liquor: I was mad at Fairfield because he invited people
to dinner and all he bought for them to drink was a pint of rum. I poured some for Anne
in a crumbling egg shell. And what does all that mean? I'm no good at interpreting
dreams. Hands fumble with clothes, and just at the delirious moment I wake up:
Is a wet dream too much to ask for? Time for a cigarette. Why are pleasures bad for you?
But how good the tobacco smoke tastes. Uhm. Blow smoke rings if you can. Or
blow me: I could do with a little carnal relief. The yard slopes down to a swampy bit,
then fields rise up where cows are pastured. They do nothing all day but eat:
filling their faces so they'll have a cud to chew on. I'm not uncowlike myself: life as a
continuous snack. Another ham salad sandwich and then

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goodbye. Will you say no to a
stack of waffles? I need a new pastime: photography turned out to be just too expensive. I
miss it though, stalking the motif, closing in on a flower, my photograph of Katherine Koch
laughing and leaning back in a porch that blazed with sunlight. You went off to Naropa
in Boulder Colorado, and I have a postcard to prove it. I think about your
lesbian love for your roommate. You're a modern miss and I like you as you are.
Today is tomorrow, it's that dead time again: three in the afternoon under scumbled clouds,
livid, that censor the sun and withold the rain: impotent as an old man ("an
old man's penis: limp as a rabbit's ear"). It's cool for August and I
can't nail the days down. They go by like escalators each alike each with its own
message of tears and laughter. I could go pick beans only Hilde beat me to it.
The drive to the village: a whole generation younger than me seems to rule the
roost. Where Sipprell the photographer used to live and work is someone else's
now. He was a kind and gentle man. I knew his sons. The one I knew best is dead
and gone now, as he is himself. Life sends us struggling forth like "the green vine
angering for life" and rewards us with a plate of popovers labeled, "your death."
Where is mine waiting? What will it be like when there's no more tomorrow? I
can't quite escape the feeling of death as a refreshing sleep from which we awaken
refreshed, in eternity. But when the chips are down I plunk them on nothingness—
my faith ran out years ago. It may come back, but I doubt it.

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"Rest in peace"
is all I have to say on the subject. I drink too much strong German coffee and
can't sleep at night. Last night I woke up laughing from a beautiful sensual
dream: a man who looked like a handsome woman who looked like a man. He told
me I should read in the sun to get a better color. But oh, the delicate touchings!
Venison stew, rank and gamey. Choke it down. Have a dumpling. Once again it's
another day, a gray day, damp as a dog's mouth, this unlikely August. In the vegetable
plot the squash are ripening, and the tomatoes. Perhaps there are nematodes: cucumbers
won't grow here. They start to produce and then the plants die back. In the garden
(the flower garden) edelweiss thrives and so do China astees. Here, at home, I'm
lonelier than alone in my New York digs. There is no one to talk to, nothing to talk
about. "Tell me the story of your life," in great detail. Your first memory, the scariest thing
that ever happened: travels and food, the works. "Are you really interested?" "Passionately."
When you rest your head like that, you suddenly look like an old woman, the old
woman you may one day become. Struggle into the shower to wash your hair, then crimp
it in rollers. You have a corrugated head. Can't you throw caution to the winds
and buy a little of some decent scent? Scent is one of the great amenities. Smelling like
a whore's dream. The dream shop and the dram shop. Dram shops in Amsterdam, old and cozy
enclosing the small fires of marvelous ginevra. It burns my throat and my eyes water—
so good to be free in the mid-afternoon, free to be a slightly

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drunk tourist, eyeing
the man-made wonders along the Amstel. Go to Naples to buy striped socks off a barrow.
Besides the dram shops there is the Pleasure Chest, with its edifying displays, pleasure takes
many forms, keep it
simple is the best bet. I especially hate the picture of two Scotties with pink bows
on their heads. Sentimentality can go further than the door to the cellar and the
braid of garlic. Guess I'm ready for lunch: ready as I'll ever be, that is.
Lunch was good: now to move my bowels. That was good too: "Oh *shit*," she said,
"I stepped in some doggy pooh." Worse things could happen to you. Meeting a
man-eating tiger in the street, for instance. A little trembling worthless
thing: a mobile. It balances five angels and I lie in bed and throw puffs of
breath at it. It does its shimmering dance. Sunday "the worst day," and we
all sit snowbound in drifts of Sunday paper. No news is good news but it
sure makes Jack a dull boy. "I can't get in there: my grades aren't good enough."
My nephew Mike came home at two in the morning from his hitch hiking trip in the Middle West. He
likes Springfield, Mo., the best. I can't make out why—a girl perhaps. He's
sixteen and smokes, which makes my brother red. I wanted to ask him if he ever
smokes pot, but a sudden shyness came over me, the way the white sky overcame
this bluest of mornings. A sound of rolling peas: traffic goes by.
"Is Fred your uncle?" my mother asked out of the dimness of time. "No, he's

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my kid brother." "Oh, I see." It's time for Hilde
to brush and comb
her hair, a glory of white. She sits all day, a monument
to patience, eighty-nine
if she's a day. We talk, but nothing comes of it. Minnesota
winters when the sleighs
whirled over the snow-covered fences and jokes were
made about the Scandinavians.
Exhilaration: one night we took the toboggan and went
to Emery Park where
there was a long, long slide on board which we sped
into the night. "I'll
wash your face in the snow!" "Get away from me, you
punk rock rabbit."
I just sat outside with my mother: my one good deed
of the day.
That day passed like any other and I took the train from
Buffalo to New York.
Buffalo, the city God forgot. Not even the Pope is going
to visit it,
and he should: it's the largest Polish city in the world.
Now I'm back
in New York, on West 23rd Street, with the buses farting
past. And the one
dog that barks its head off at two or three in the morning.
I hate to miss
the country fall, I think with longing of my years in
Southampton, leaf-turning
trips to cool Vermont. Things should get better as you
grow older, but that
is not the way. The way is inscrutable and hard to handle.
Here it is
the Labor Day weekend and all my friends are out of town:
just me and some
millions of others, to whom I have not yet been introduced.
A walk in the
streets is not the same as a walk on the beach, by
preference, a beach

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emptied by winter winds. A few days, and friends will
trickle back to
town. Dinner parties, my favorite form of entertainment.
Though in these
inflationary times you're lucky to get chicken in
place of steak.
What I save on meals I spend on taxis. Lately a lot
of cabs have
signs: NO SMOKING, PLEASE, or NO SMOKING DRIVER ALLERGIC
a quiet smoke in
a taxi is my idea of bliss. Yes, everything gets more
restricted, less free.
Yet I am free, one of the lucky ones who does not
have to show up
Monday morning at some boring desk. I remember the years
at NBC looking
discontentedly out at grimy Sixth Avenue, waiting for
the time to pass.
It did. Pass, I mean, and I took ship for Europe. A
pleasant interlude
on the whole, despite my operation. I miss Rino, my
Roman lover, and
often wonder how he is and what he's up to. Probably
a grandfather by
now. Good day, Signor Oscari: are you still a grocer
by trade? Did
your uncle die and leave you his shop in the *pereferia*?
Italy seems so
far away (just a few hours by plane) and, you see,
since I was there
I fell in love with an island in Maine, now out of
bounds. I'd like to
find a new place, somewhere where there are friends and
not too many
houses. This summer has passed like a dream. On the last
day of August,
I feel much better than I felt in June, heaven be praised.
Who said, "Only

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health is beautiful"? There's truth in the old saw. I have always been
more interested in truth than in imagination: I wonder if that's
true? I have one secret which I sometimes have an almost overwhelming desire
to blurt out; but I won't. Actually, I have told it to my shrink, so it's
not an absolute secret anymore. Too bad. Are secrets a way of telling lies,
I wonder? Yes, they are. So, let it be. I don't drink anymore, still, I
just had four double cocktails: Margaritas. At least I stopped there. I
like not drinking. Hangovers were too horrible. I MEAN THAT. Really mean it.
Tomorrow is another day, but no better than today if you only realize it.
Let's love today, the *what we have now*, this day, not today or tomorrow or
yesterday, but this passing moment, that will not come again.
Now tomorrow is today, the day before Labor Day, 1979. I want to
live to see the new century come in: but perhaps it's bad luck to
say so. To live to be seventy-six: is that so much to ask? My father
died in his forties, but his mother lived to be ninety, as my mother seems
likely to. In what rubbishy old folks home will I pass my sunset years?
A house on the edge of a small town, private but convenient, is my
wish. I won't say no to Vermont or Maine, not that I want to spend
my old age shoveling snow. I spent my youth doing that. Our drive

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was cut into the side of a hill and no sooner
was it cleared
than the wind would drift it full again. Monotonous
days, day dreaming
of any place but there. It rained earlier today: I
lay on the bed
and watched the beads it formed on the foliage of
my balcony balustrade
drop of their own weight. I remember the night the
house in Maine
was struck by lightning. It was attracted to a
metal flue
and coursed harmlessly down to the wood burning
stove that heated
the bath water for my end of the house. I could
write a book about
the island, but I don't want to. I want to write
more novels. I've made more false starts than anyone
since Homer was a
pup. Now it's dinner time: time to feed the inner man. I
wish I could go
on a diet of water for a few days: to reduce the outer
man to weigh what
he should weigh. A letter from Joe Brainard: he's
my favorite pen pal.
Joe decides what he's going to do, then he does it.
This summer it's
been sunbathing and reading Dickens and Henry James.
And he sends a poem:

"Ah! the good old days!"
If gobbled then—digested now.
(Clarified by time—romanticized by mind)
For today's repast remembered.
and:
Reminds me of you—Jimmy—out in
Southampton in the big Porter House, in your
little room of many books, it takes game
board strategy to relocate now, as then"
and:

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Out trekking up South Main Street
you are:
a pair of thick white legs
sporting Bermuda shorts
(of a *most* unusual length)
and plain blue sneakers so "you"
they are.

I tripped and fell the other night and struck the curb with my head,
face forward. I went to the emergency at St. Vincent's. They put stitches
in my chin: I look like "The Masque of the Red Death." Feel like it, too.
I wish this humid unsunny day would get its act together and take it on the road.
It's no day for writing poems. Or for writing, period. So I didn't.
Write, that is. The bruises on my face have gone, just a thin scab on
the chin where they put the stitches. I'm back on Antabuse: what a drag. I
really love drinking, but once I'm sailing I can't seem to stop. So, pills
are once again the answer. It must have been horrible to live before
the days of modern medicine—all those great artists going off their chump
from syphilis or coughing their lungs out with TB. But they still haven't
found a live-forever pill. But soon. Across the street sunlight falls like
a shadow on the Palladian office building. This room faces north, which
usually I don't like, but the French doors to the balcony make it light
enough. I ought to buy a plant, but plants are too much like pets: suppose
you want to go away (and I do), someone has to take care of it. So I waste my

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money on cut flowers. I'm spoiled: I'm used to gathering
flowers for the house,
not buying them. Thirty-five dollars for a dozen roses.
Sterling Silver:
not today. Always thinking about what things cost: well,
I have to, except
when a cab comes in my view: then I flag it down.
I'd be scared to
figure up how much I spend a year on chauffeur-driven
comfort. I'd like to spend
part of this lovely
day in a darkened movie theater: only there's nothing I
want to see. Fellini's
Orchestra Rehearsal was too much like *Alice in Orchestralia.*
Perhaps a good
walk is more what's called for. I could tool down to
Dave's Pot Belly
and have a butterscotch sundae: eating on the pounds I
walked off. Or
I could go shopping: I need cologne. Taylor's Eau de Portugal
for choice. In the
country you can take a walk without spending money. In the
city it isn't
easy. This soft September sun makes the air fizzy like
soda water: Perrier
in the odd shaped bottle from France. I dreamed last
night about autumn
trees: orange, red, yellow and the oaks dark green. I
wish there were
something besides gingkoes and plane trees to see short
of Central Park.
"It does wonders for your back . . ." The radio is on:
perhaps this will
be a lucky day and they'll play something besides the
New World Symphony
or Telemann. I could call Ruth and chat, only it isn't
noon, so she
isn't up yet. It still isn't noon: it's tomorrow
morning. The risen

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sun almost comes in the north windows: I see it lie
along the balcony,
cut into shapes by the wrought iron balustrade, a
design of crazy
chrysanthemums and willow leaves. This old hotel is
well built: if
you hold your breath and make a wish you'll meet Virgil
Thomson in the elevator
or a member of a punk rock band. I still want to go to
a movie but
there isn't any. A month ago when I wasn't in the
mood there were lots:
Flying Down to Rio, *Million Dollar Legs*, *Blonde Bombshell*
or do I date myself?
A red, pink, and blue slip on my desk tells me that
I am going to
spend forty dollars to have a jacket relined. A child
of the thirties,
that seems to me what you spend for a new suit. More
money! I got that
cologne: sixteen-twenty. Think I'll splash some on
right now. Uhm. Feels good.
I think I'll take a shower.
No. That would mean taking my clothes off and putting
them on again. I
haven't got the energy for that. And the waste of hot water!
And I should wash my hair.
But that would mean putting my shoes on and a tromp around
the corner to the
drugstore that isn't open yet. Or I could wash it with plain
cucumber soap and
rinse it with lime juice (I think there is a lime). I
think I'll leave it matted
and get it cut—oh—tomorrow. For a while I let it get
really long, I
looked like Buffalo Bill's mother. Ruth says, "Oh Jimmy,
you look much better
with short hair." "Graciousness, part of the Japanese
character." The radio

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is still on. "It's time for one of our classical hits:
you'll recognize this
one." But I don't. Good grief, it's "Greensleeves." I'm
a real music lover!
I'd rather listen to rock, but if I tune WNCN out I
can never find it
again. Last night they played the Brahms Second Piano
Concerto which sent
me off contentedly to bye-bye land. The sleeping pills
I scoffed helped too.
It used to be when I checked out a medicine chest there
would be lots of
amphetamines. No more. Doctors won't prescribe them.
I heard a rumor
about a diet doctor in Queens who will. Must find out
his address. But
Queens seems awfully far to give the day a gentle lift.
I can do it with
coffee, only that much coffee gives me sour stomach. Urp.
Belch. Guess I'll
make a cup of Taster's Choice. My sister-in-law and
Donald Droll both use
that brand. Not bad. *The Burning Mystery of Anna in 1951:*
I prefer the genteel wackiness
of John Ashbery's *As You Know.* A poem written in two
columns, supposed to
be read simultaneously: John is devoted to the impossible.
The sunlight still
sits on my balcony, invitingly. I decline the invitation:
out there, it gives
me vertigo. People who come here say, "Ooh, you have a
balcony," as though I
spent my days out there surveying Twenty-third Street:
Chelsea Sewing Center,
Carla Hair Salon. Twenty-third Street hasn't got much
going for it, unless
you love the YMCA. I once did. I remember Christmas '41

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I was in the shower
when a hunk walked in. I got a hard-on just like that.
He dropped his soap
to get a view of it and in no time we were in bed in
his room. Sure was
a change from West Virginia. When I told Alex Katz I
went to college in West
Virginia, he said in that irritating way of his, "Nah,
you're Harvard." Wish I
were, but I'm a lot more panhandle than I am Cambridge,
Mass. Which reminds
me, I saw in the *Times* that my old friend Prof. Billy
Vinson died of the
heart condition he knew he had. Billy was the Navy Officer
who, when he was
getting fucked by an ape-like sailor, lifted his head out of
the pillow and
said, "I order you back to your ship." His camp name was
Miss Williemae.
He was a virologist who detected two new viruses, which he
named for Chester
Kallman and me: Fiordiligi and Dorabella. If anybody called
me by my camp name
nowadays I'd sock them—I like to think. I remember how
I felt when Chester
dedicated his book to me and wrote the poem in "camp":
"Wearing a garden hat her mother
wore . . ." Bitch. Chester's gone now, and so are Wystan, Billy
Vinson, Brian,
Howard, Bill Aalto and Brian's
friend, the red haired boy whose name I can't remember.
Chester was a martyr
to the dry Martini. So, in his way, was Wystan. Brian
committed suicide:
Why do people do that? For fun? Brian was the most
bored and boring man
I ever met. He was what the French call épatant: he told

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an American officer
that he was a clandestine homosexual. The officer knocked
him to the bar room floor.
Brian looked up and said, "That proves it." I could tell
a thousand Brian
stories, the way some people can reel off limericks. For
a great poet, Wystan
Auden's dirty limericks are singularly uninspired. Sorry
I can't remember any
to quote you. *The Platonic Blow* gives me hives. Funny porn
I guess is a gift,
like any other. Who wrote:
"Lil tried shunts and double-shunts
And all tricks known to common cunts. . . ."?
A tired newspaperman? A gifted coal miner in West
Virginia? The morning
passes like an elephant in no stampede. The morning
passes like Salome's veil. Famous last
lines: "I am still alive!" and "Kill that woman!" Fast
curtain. The morning
passes too slowly. I want it to be 7:45 in the evening
when I'm invited
to dine on delectables chez John Ashbery. I wonder if the
cuisine will be
Indian? The little minx took a course in it, after all
those years in France.
Tall Doug and blond Frank will be there: I wonder about
David Kermani of the
shoe button eyes? Lately whenever I've gone there he's
been out on some
important errand: is he avoiding me? I hope not. I like
him. What a
devil he is for work. I hope his boss Tibor values him
at his true worth.
The sun is off the balcony. The sun is off: a scrim of
cloud obscures the
sky. Yesterday was such a heaven day: blue, warm, breezy.

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When I cabbed up to Barbara's
I found the park full of joggers: men and women whose breasts and buttocks
went jounce jounce. Uhm: a shave and a splash of Eau de Portugal,
Taylor's best. I mustn't use it up too fast: think what it costs. The only trouble
with it is that it doesn't hang on: I like a cologne that makes people say, "You
smell good," like Guerlain's Imperial. Paco really hangs on:
people who say, "You smell so good," look as though they're going to retch.
I threw caution to the winds and threw it out. I would like to go
in the bathroom and swizzle on some of Taylor's best, but the maid is in
there stinking up the house with household ammonia. "Is that girl who
comes and takes care of you your niece?" she asked me. No, Eileen Myles is
my assistant: she comes and makes my breakfast and lunch, runs errands
to the grocery store, the p.o., the bank, mails letters, and always arrives with
that morning's *Times*. I lie in bed and read the obituaries and smell the French
toast frying. Served with applesass. I think I'll let her take the laundry
out, she needs the exercise. The sun is off the balcony, the air is cool
as one of Barbara's kisses which don't make me feel I turn her on.
Her husband won't give her money to pay the cleaning woman and they
have a huge co-op. It is all neat and tidy. Barbara is very organized

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for a literary lady. She loaned me a book about Natalie Barney I thought
would be fascinating but the writing is much too coy, "Amazon" instead of
dyke or Lesbian. I always think I can read anything but some things turn me off:
like trying to read jellied gasoline, I could almost put a sweater on,
the air from the French doors is so cool. But I think I like to live
cold, like George Montgomery and Frank O'Hara wearing chinos and sneakers
in the snow at Harvard. It was the thing to do. "I'd like to kiss Jimmy," said
a dope who came to the door. Frank made a grand gesture at me lying reading on
the couch and said, "Help yourself." So he did. I wonder what I was reading?
I should keep a reading diary of all the books and mags I read, but what
would be the use? I can't remember what I read. I read Graham Greene's *A*
Sort of Life and a week later reread it without remembering anything, except his
playing Russian Roulette. It's a lovely book, the writing is so concrete, I
have a foible for books of family life, like Gwen Raverat's *Period Piece* and
Frances Marshall's *A Pacifist's War.* I went out to post some letters (Chemical
Bank, Denver Art Museum, Richard Savitsky, my lawyer) and the sun was hot. In
the shadows it was cool but when you stepped into a sun-spot you felt the heat.
It's a beautiful day, the gray nimbus devoured itself. No clouds at all.
I bought the *Post.* More mothers killing their babies be-

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cause they're mad
at their husbands. What kind of sense does that make?
Maybe they wanted to have
abortions and their husbands wouldn't let them. How
does that grab you?
Eileen took the double-breasted blazer Joe Hazan
gave me to have
the sleeves shortened half-an-inch. It came from Hunts-
man! I used to have a
Huntsman hacking raincoat. In Alex Katz's painting
Incident you can see
me wearing it, flanked by Ada Katz in a hat and Rudi
Burkhardt with a
camera. That was a long time ago. I wonder if they still
have their Teddy Wilson
record? The Alicia della Rocha of the hot piano.
A few days! I
started this poem in August and here it is September
nineteenth. September
is almost my favorite month, barring October and May.
November, my natal
month is too damn wintry, I don't like it but I like
my birthstone, the topaz.
In Venice I saw a pair of cufflinks, square topazes
edged with paste
diamonds—sixty-five bucks, but Arthur, who was
picking up the check,
wouldn't buy them for me. Cheap is cheap. It was funny
having no money of
my own. Every time I went out sightseeing I would see
a black and red knitted
tie I wanted passionately to own. Last weekend I spent
at Barbara's in
Water Mill: a funny turreted house, commodious within,
(This coffee is too strong),
all the woodwork very nineteen-hundred, dark wood
balusters and cream walls,

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Barbara's pictures: Paul Georges, Robert Goodenough, Fairfield Porter. We went
to call on Anne Porter who is selling the house at 49 South Main where I used
to live. The library was void of books: it made me sad, the way it did when
my mother sold her house. That one back room in the el was *my* room. I could
lie in the four poster on the horse-hair mattress and stare at Fairfield's color
lithograph of Sixth Avenue and the Waverly Theater entranced by its magic.
The cover of *Hymn to Life* is Fairfield's version of the view from my
south window: the wondrous pear tree in white bloom. Did you know that you
can force pears to bloom? Go out in the snow and cut a few knobbly twigs
with buds. Soak them overnight in water, put them in a vase and hold your breath:
a Chinese print is what you have. A haircut: Breck's shampoo for normal hair.
I looked for the *New York Review of Books* which has a review in it of my novel
by Stephen Spender. Couldn't find it. Damn. It's funny, having a review come
out a whole year later. Everyone on the street was wearing sweaters. There was a
man lying on the sidewalk, one shoe off, his shirt unbuttoned down to his
navel. Passersby looked at him coldly, nobody offered to help him. I
curbed my Good Samaritan instincts. Poor guy: once he was a little boy. How
do you degenerate that way? There aren't any novels about blind stiffs these
days: *Tramping on Life* and Jim Tully. Joe Hazan, who lives

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in a Fifth Avenue penthouse,
went on the bum when he was young. I'm thinking about D.D. Ryan and her "mothwing" eyebrows.
She says they grew that way, but in a bright light I wondered.
She never appears until her face is on. Her boys, Beau and Dru,
are match happy. I went
outside and there in the autumn leaves was a circle of flame. We managed to stamp
it out. It was right by the house: Kenward's little cottage reduced to ashes! Almost.
D.D.'s Vuitton cosmetic trunk that weighed a ton. When we stopped at the diner
in Rutland I saw a stark-naked man in the john. He dashed into a stall and hid
himself. "I really hate to do this," D.D. said passing a car on the right
at ninety miles an hour. "*On ne vois pas la rivage de la morte deux fois, D.D.*,"
as Racine said. When we got to New York Kenward and I went to Casey's
and got hysterical with laughter.
Blossoming afternoon, what can I tell you? You tell me that my hair is clean and cut.
Breck's Shampoo for Normal Hair, 40¢ off. It's nice and gloopy. I'd like to
take a bubble bath but I haven't got the stuff. Bath oil is risky business:
it coats the tub with slime and taking a shower is a perilous stunt. Help! my Eau
de Portugal is half-empty. I've been slathering it on. I love it. I ought to
get a Caswell-Massey sampler and see what smells best. Patchouli. Vetiver (ugh). September
evening, what have you to say to me? Tell me the time. Still two and three quarters hours

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until John's. I'm reading Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, stitched in brocade. I
read a page, then rush back to my poem. I would once have thought that Sitwell
was "influencing" me. I'm too me for that. Poor trembling Osbert, suffering from
Parkinson's disease. I met him at a party Wystan gave for them, John was
dashing tears from his eyes: "What's wrong?" "I just met Edith Sitwell." Tender
heart. Edith looked less like her photographs. She was creased and had that
famous nose. September day, how shall I color you? In blue and white and airy tones.
September evening, you give your benediction. Ruth is in love with a priest
(an Episcopalian) who smokes grass. Ruth can convert from Judaism and wear a
hat in church. "The Overture to Zampa led by Leonard Bernstein and the New York
Philharmonic." The radio is such a pleasure. A Hand in a Glove: a vase
you couldn't believe. "Price includes roundtrip air fare" oh the radio! I
can't live without it. Yes, I must put a sweater on. Brrr. September, how fickle you are.
There is the shadow of a flapping flag. The Plaza Hotel was flying a Japanese
flag: who was staying there? I have on a George Schneeman T-shirt, a plaid
shirt on a coat hanger. Useless gas. Here is my Blue Cross/ Blue Shield number 11223677
HO8. I don't know my social security number. It's in two names: James Ridenour
and James Schuyler. Ridenour was my stepfather's name, and when I went to
Europe in 1947 I found my name had never legally been

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changed. Sometimes someone
comes up to me and says, "Aren't you Jimmy Ridenour?" I plotz. It's good to
have your own name. Ask me, I'll tell you. It's pink! the light I mean
shining from the west on the office building. The sunset. That's the trouble with
a north view: you can't see the sunset. North is kinda dreary. Will it be dark
when I set out for John Ashbery's? It spooks me. His apartment is so nice:
full of French antiques and oriental rugs and collectibles. An angel wing begonia
and wandering Jew, peperomia. He has willowware china which reminds me of
the Willow Tea Room where I used to eat in eighth grade. Salisbury steak. Chop suey.
There were motifs from the willowware painted on the walls. It's Wednesday morning, but
later than I got up yesterday: the sun is off the balcony. There's a chill in the air,
I put on a Jaeger sweater, sand color. The dinner was nice: cold soup, veal
scallops with a brown sauce, broccoli, noodles, pineapple upside-down cake, whipped cream.
The latter had rum in it and I ate it rather nervously but it didn't activate the Antabuse.
"Rather nervously" describes the way I was all evening: just sat and drank Perrier
and smoked. Didn't say a word, even when someone spoke to me. I meant to say
to John, "Is there any coffee in the house?" Instead, I said, "Is there any liquor in
the house?" He looked astounded. I faced it out, didn't tell him what I really
meant. I have a sleeping pill hangover—my head feels like Venetian glass. I

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only took two pills, not three, which puts me to sleep but makes me feel crappy.
The *Times* says there's a vogue for pumps: Eileen and I did the galleries and I
watched the women's feet: they were all wearing sandals, very chic, especially
a black chick who had on a stylish suit. I thought I could beat the starting gun
by taking my pills at seven: seven Sleepeze, two nembutal, the scoffed pills, three
anti-depressant pills, a red pill that controls the side-effects of the anti-depressants.
I went to sleep like a babe, and here I am wide awake at eleven. Anne Dunn is here.
She can't see me until Saturday lunch. I wanted to have dinner with her tonight.
Christ I feel shitty. I took two more sleeping pills and what I feel like: creamed
shit. I lay in bed for an hour it was torture. It's the witching hour of night.
I feel great. This is the morning it's wonderful. I can't tell you about it,
it's a grand day. I feel shitty. I feel cold and I mailed letters today:
Denver Art Museum, Chemical Bank (that should bring in money), Savitsky my lawyer: he pays my bills, like
the rent ($550). I went back to bed and slept some after all. Eleven hours all told. Not bad,
but I still have the old sleeping pill hangover. "He brought it on himself."
I know I'm going to regret it but still I do take that one extra pill at
the wrong time. I could kick myself around the block. It's getting light out,
not sunlight, just morning gray. It looks the way it feels: chill. THE LAW FIRM
OF RICHARD D. SAVITSKY a card says. I wonder if I

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trust him? There's no reason why
I shouldn't. I wonder how they broke the news to him.
"There's this guy who keeps
having nervous breakdowns and he can't pay the hospital
bills—state hospitals being, of course, out of the
question." Bellevue is proof of that: the scary patients,
the nothing to do, the
insolent staff (that one nice girl), the egg for breakfast,
one morning I had a bowl of cream of wheat, the black
guy sitting next to me said, "Hunh, putting sugar on
grits"—so this is
what grits are—people stealing cigarettes out of your
pajama pocket while you sleep,
patients who will share a cigarette with you, you have to
be an enforced abstainer
to know you'll never give up smoking, Christ I'm cold,
the up-in-the-air TV you can't see, just a blur, the ennui,
the doctor: "If there's any more
smoking on this side, smoking privileges will be taken
away." *That's* when you know
you'll never give up smoking. When I was in, you could
only smoke if you had money to buy the cigarettes.
I didn't have any money and had to depend on the charity
of others. It was surprising
how many there were who were charitable. I swore I'd
never give up smoking. I
did though. It turned me into a fiend. I took up the costly
cigar. My first cigarette
tasted good. I talk big: I have a pain in my chest and
worry about lung cancer.
Better make an appointment with the doc. I don't like my
doctors, except the dentist and my shrink. "Come on
in Jim." "What are you thinking about?" "Nothing." Not
true: you're always thinking something.
I'm thinking about this poem. How to make it good,
really good. I'm proud of my poems.
I wrote a poem about Ruth Kligman in which every line

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began, "Ruth"—
talk about maddening. Ruth claimed to like it. When I told her it was a
stinker she said, "I didn't think it was one of your best." I've got to find that
notebook and tear it up, when I'm dead some creep will publish it in a thin
volume called "Uncollected Verse." It will be a collector's item. I hate to think
of the contents of that volume. "Dorabella's Hat," "They Two are Drifting Uptown on a
Bus." Bill Berkson asked me to send him any writings I had, so I sent him "They Two." He didn't publish it. It's
very funny. The two are Frank and Larry. It's not a poem. It's a playlet. I used
to write lots of playlets. "Presenting Jane" is lost. It was produced. By
Herbert Machiz. It was horrible thanks to Herbert. When I first met Herbert
he said, "A nice looking boy like you shouldn't have dirty finger nails." I blanched. I looked at my
nails: I felt creepy. "I work in a book store," I *extenuated*. "Is it
a second-hand book store?" he demanded. "No, it specializes in
English books." "English dirt." I recounted this to Frank who broke out laughing!
"Jimmy, Herbert is a wit." Herbert dropped dead on a rug. John Latouche
fell down a flight of stairs in a small gray clapboard cottage at Apple Hill
among the leaves at Calais (pronounced callous) Vermont. Wystan died in his sleep
in a hotel in ring-streeted Vienna not far from his country home in verdant
southern Austria: Austria utterly turns me off: the goldenesdachtel at Innsbruck

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is the worst thing, except for the dragon of Klagenfurt,
Egg-am-Fackersee. The train
through torrent-torn needle-clad (I mean trees like
spruce, pines, and firs),
mountains and granite-boulders, then you're in Italy
among the lemon
lamps and "permesso," which means move or I will mow
you down with this dolly of
bricks. Then there's "Ti da fastidio?" which means, "If
I smoke will it give you the fastids?"
Then one day
the telephone:
it's Hilde:
"Mother passed on
in her sleep
last night. No
you needn't
come, it's not that
kind of a ceremony.
Fred is seeing
to it all right
now. The last
three months were
pretty grim."
And so I won't be
there to see my Maney
enearthed beside
my stepfather:
once, when I was
home a while ago,
I said I realized
that in his way he
loved me. "He did
not," my mother said,
"Burton hated you."
The old truth teller!
She was so proud

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in her last dim
years (ninety years
are still
a few days) to be
longest lived of
the Slaters: for-
getting her mother
was the Slater,
she a Connor:
Margaret Daisy Connor Schuyler Ridenour,
rest well,
the weary journey done.

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Portfolio

It Was The Smallest Pizza They Had Ever Seen

Glen Baxter

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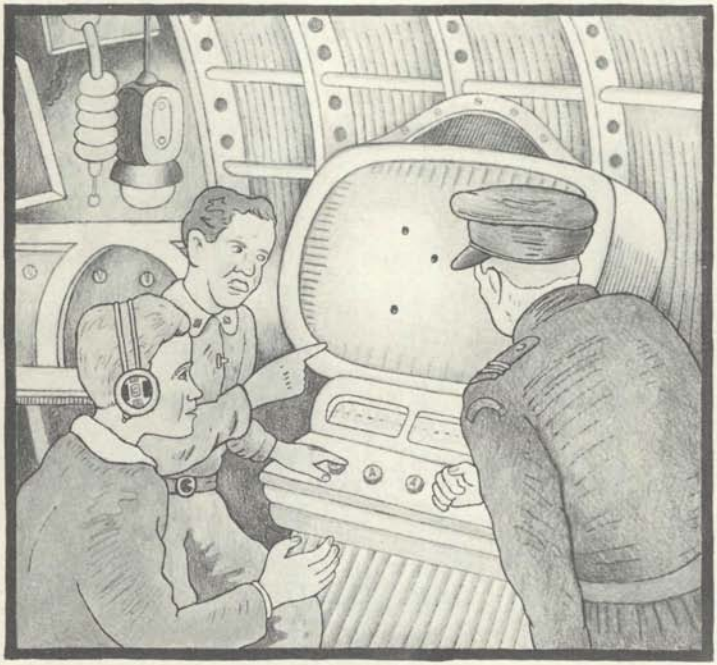

"WE'VE ONLY ENOUGH OLIVES LEFT FOR THREE MORE MARTINIS, SIR..." QUAKED LAWSON

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"WE DON'T HOLD WITH PUCCINI AT THE LAZY Z" SNARLED TEX

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SLOWLY, BUT WITH UNERRING PRECISION,
DR. TUTTLE REACHED FOR HIS LUGER...

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IT WAS THE SMALLEST
PIZZA THEY HAD EVER SEEN

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ROBIN WAS CERTAINLY IMPRESSED
WITH THE SIMULATED TEAK FINISH

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"WE'LL HAVE NO ALLITERATION IN THIS HERE BUNKHOUSE!" SNORTED Mc CULLOCH

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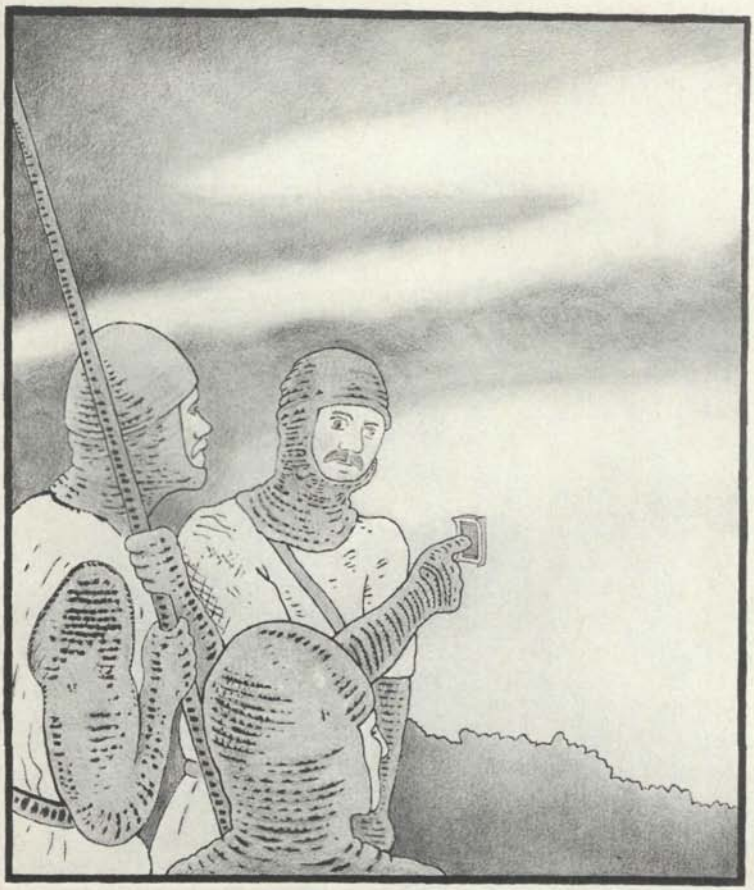

SIR ROLAND TRIED TO CONVINCE THE SCEPTICS OF THE POTENTIAL OF HIS LIGHTWEIGHT MINI-SHIELD

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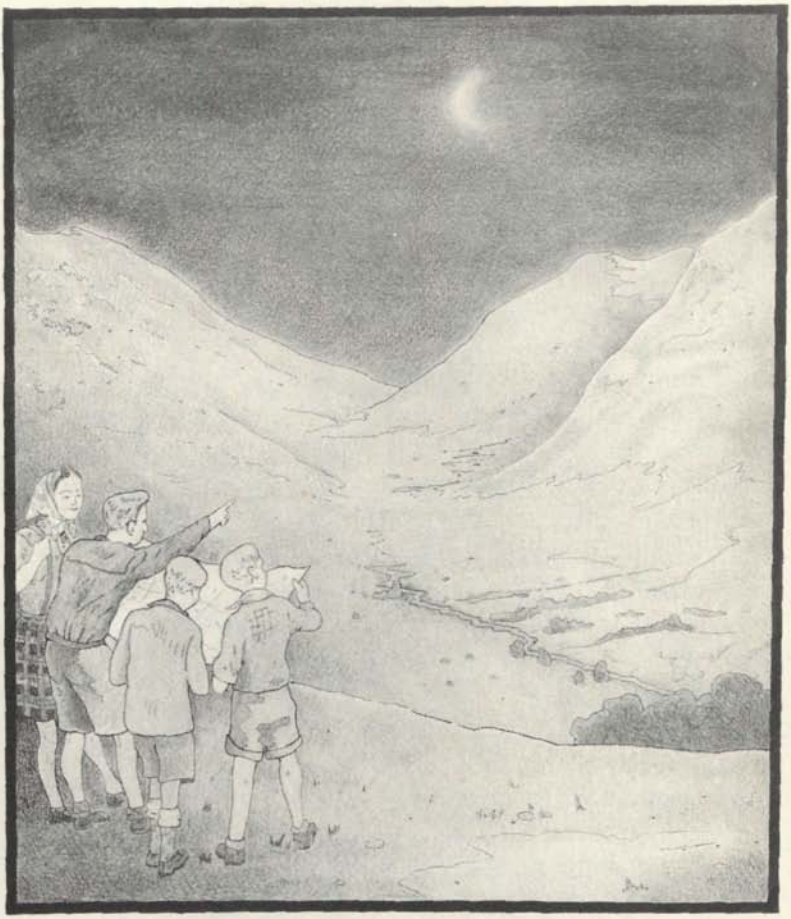

WITH A CHEERY LITTLE GRUNT, MR ROBERTS INDICATED JUST WHERE HE HAD BURIED OUR CHEESE SANDWICHES

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Four Poems by Galway Kinnell

The Geese

As soon as they come over the mountain
into the Connecticut valley and see the river
they will follow until nightfall,
bodies, or cells, begin to tumble
between the streamers of their flight,
thinning the left, thickening the right;
and shaking with its inner noises
the flock shifts weight like a snowplowing skier
and turns, and yahonks and spirit-cries
toward that flow of light spelled into its windings
endlessly ago—each body flashing white
against the white sky when the wings lift,
and black when they fall, the invisible
continuously perforating the visible—
and trembles away, to vanish, but before that
to semi-vanish, as a mirage
or deepest desire does when it gets
the right distance from us and becomes rhythmic.

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The Old Life

The waves collapsed into themselves
with heavy rumbles in the darkness
and the soprano shingle whistled
gravely its way back down into the sea.
When the moon came from behind clouds
its white full-moon's light
lightly oiled the little beach stones
back into silence. We stood
among shatterings, glitterings,
the brilliance. For some reason
to love does not seem ever
to hurt any less. Now it happens
another lifetime is up for us,
another life is upon us.
What's left is what is left
of the whole absolutely love-time.

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Chamberlain's Porch

On three sides of the stretcher bed
where I half-sleep, rainwater runs down
boughs all broken out in buds, out there
in the world the porch screen cuts up
into tiny, very perishable rectangles.
Rain putters down on the wood shingles overhead,
now smattering heavily, becoming
a language I think I will learn one day,
now slackening, making the sounds
of delicate kissings between one and one,
which some memorize even into the grave;
as though the mechanism governing the inner
pluckings of things, which goes forward forever,
pauses to try its backward variations
on this wood-shingled porch roof in Connecticut.
Very distinctly, close to my ear,
a child's voice whispers "Grandpa!" A child
still to be found? Or me, long ago,
calling an already lost grandfather?
Rain flurries down suddenly very thick,
overall batterings of the first shovelfuls
on a roof under which only a body half-listens.

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The Frog Pond

In those first years I came down
often to the frog pond—formerly,
before the earthen dam gave way,
the farm pond—to bathe, standing
on a rock and throwing pond water over me,
and doing it quickly because of the leeches,
who need but minutes to know you're there,
or to read the mail or to scribble
or to loaf and think—sometimes of the future—
while the one deer fly
which torments every venturer into July
in Vermont, smack it dead as often
as one will, buzzed about my head.
A few years after I got here, the beavers came,
pointed their rows of sharpened sticks
at the water and made it rise,
and the frog pond became the beaver pond.
The next year an old row boat appeared,
half-sunk and moored to a stump,
with sheet metal nailed all around it
to hold the hull boards in place
while they rotted. The four
of us would oar, pole, and bail out
a few feet about the sunken green bank
where a man used to sit and think
and look up and seem to see four people
up here oaring and poling and bailing out
above him: the man *seems* happy,
the two children laugh and splash,
a slight shadow crosses the woman's face
as though she must wait for him. Then one spring
the beavers disappeared—
trapped off; or else gone off
on their own, to make a pond elsewhere—
in which case this pond and that one

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and the next, one after one, will flow off,
each leaving its print behind,
a sudden green meadow in the woods
with gleams of sky wandering through it.
The man who lies propped up
on an elbow, scribbling into a notebook
or loafing and thinking, will be older
and will remember a pond was here,
writhing with leeches and overflown
by the straight blue bodies of dragonflies
and will think of little children
grown up and of true love broken
and will sit up abruptly and swat
the hard-biting deer fly on his head,
crushing it into his hair, as he has done before.

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Three Poems by Sharon Olds

The Solution

Finally they got the Singles problem under control, they made it scientific. They opened huge Sex Centers—you could simply go and state what you want and they would find you someone who wanted that too. You would stand under a sign saying *I Like To Be Touched and Held* and when someone came and stood under the sign saying *I Like To Touch and Hold* they would send the two of you off together.

At first it went great. A steady stream of people under the sign *I Like To Give Pain* paired up with the steady stream of people from under *I Like To Receive Pain. Foreplay Only—No Orgasm* found its adherents, and *Orgasm Only—No Foreplay* matched up its believers. A loyal Berkeley, California, policeman stood under the sign *Married Adults, Lights Out, Face to Face, Under a Sheet*, because that's the only way it was legal in Berkeley—but he stood there a long time in his lonely blue law coat. And the man under *I Like To Be Sung To While Bread Is Kneaded On My Stomach* had been there weeks without a reply.

Things began to get strange. The *Love Only—No Sex* was doing fine; the *Sex Only—No Love* was doing really well, pair after pair walking out together like wooden animals off a child's ark, but the line for *38 D Or Bigger* was getting unruly, shouting insults at the line for *8 Inches Or Longer*, and odd isolated signs were springing up everywhere, *Retired Schoolteacher And Parakeet—No Leather*; *One Rm/No Bath/View of Sausage Factory.*

The din rose in the vast room. The line under *I Want To Be Fucked Senseless* was so long that portable toilets had to be added and a minister brought in for deaths, births, and marriages on the line. Over under *I Want To Fuck Senseless*—no one, a pile of guns. A hollow roaring filled the enormous gym.

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More and more people began to move over to *Want to Be Fucked Senseless.* The line snaked around the gym, the stadium, the whole town, out into the fields. More and more people joined it, until *Fucked Senseless* stretched across the nation in a huge wide belt like the Milky Way and since they had to name it they named it, they called it the American Way.

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I Cannot Forget the Woman in the Mirror

Backwards and upside down in the twilight, that
woman on all fours, her head
dangling and suffused, her lean
haunches, the area of darkness, the flanks and
ass narrow and pale as a deer's and those
breasts hanging down toward the center of the earth like
plummets, when I
swayed from side to side they swayed, it was
so dark I couldn't tell if they were gold or
plum or rose. I cannot get over her
moving toward him upside down in the mirror like a
fly on the ceiling, her head hanging down and her
tongue long and dark as an anteater's
going toward his body, she was so clearly an
animal, she was an Indian creeping
naked and noiseless, and when I looked at her
she looked at me so directly, her eyes so
dark, her stare said to me I
belong here, this is mine, I am living out my
true life on this earth.

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12 years old

When my girl and her friend walk away from me
at the swimming pool, I see her friend's
sweet stick legs, thin as
legs drawn by a child, and then I
see my daughter's curved hocks and
haunches, her hips that behind my back have
swelled until they taper delicious as
chicken legs, the liquid meat of the
thigh. Her joints gently grind and
suck and rock as she walks in rich
innocence toward the diving board, her
chest flat as a plank, the front of her
torso meek and raw as a kid's, but her
ass delicately flashes its signals:
Soon, now, the gold glow of the
warning lights. She mounts the ladder, her
skin twinkling wet as the basted
broiler half-way done to a turn, she
sways her frail way down the board
waving its wand in the air, the water
far below her rich with college boys, she
grins toward me, her head slick, and
takes the plunge, her pale body
plummeting through the air in silence and then
entering the water with the charged thrust of her
knife into the chicken when she is really hungry.

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Three Poems by Jaan Kaplinski

Our Shadows

are very long
when we return at night from haying
but we ourselves are small

The camomile clasps its hands together
as if in prayer
A woman with a sickle creeps up the hill
as she did a thousand years ago

Beyond the courtyard
the heath
beyond the heath forest

Heather heather-colored
whither dost thou fly little bee
that heaven
is so vast and void
once we will return
once we will all return

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Non-being Pervades Everything

and being is full of peace.
Your translation of Lao-tse can be right or wrong—an open
book
speaks today as an open butterfly and in the pollen
movement meets immobility in the same way.
The spring breeze flows through our hair and clothes.
If I speak, it is because the consolation is so much more
than ourselves waiting for it: waters breaking in from
everywhere,
the tent roof taking flight in the clear night of Lapland,
necklaces falling shattered: phrases, life and wisdom.
So this is it, this is you. The eyes are melting
in the white clouds, it is love, love that cuts us
from squared paper and lets the fire warm us
and the rain come through us until between the earth
and us
the last borderlines vanish. This is love: the leaves of trees
and the light like ourselves full of evidence of the infinite.
We shall be and we shall be what is not,
we shall remain what belongs to no one.

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Every Understanding

comes in due time
your little hands
on my rough cheeks
first snow
always
to someone
for the first
for someone
for the last
time

translated from the Estonian
by Sam Hamill

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Three Poems by Rita Dove

Lightnin' Blues

On the radio a canary bewailed her luck
while the county outside was kicking with rain.
The kids bickered in the back seat;
the wife gasped whenever lightning struck
where it damn well pleased. Friday night,

and he never sang better. The fish
would be flashing like beautiful sequined cigars.
This time he'd fixed the bait himself,
cornmeal and a little sugar water
stirred to a ball on the stove,
pinched off for the scavenger carp.

So why did the car stall? And leap
backwards every time he turned the key?
Was Gabriel a paper man, a horn player
who could follow only the notes on the score?
Or was this sheriff the culprit,
pressing his badge to the window to say
You're lucky—a tree fell on the road ahead
just a few minutes ago.

Turned around, the car started
meek as a lamb. No one spoke
but that old trickster on the radio,
Kingfish addressing the Mystic Knights of the Sea.

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The Satisfaction Coal Company

1.
What to do with a day. Leaf
through *Jet*. Watch T.V.
Freezing on the porch
but he goes anyhow, snow too high
for a walk, the ice treacherous.
Inside, the gas heater takes care of itself;
he doesn't even notice being warm.

Everyone says he looks great.
Across the street a drunk stands smiling
at something carved in a tree.
The new neighbor with the floating hips
scoots out to get the mail
and waves once, brightly,
storm door clipping her heel on the way in.

2.
Twice a week he had taken the bus down Glendale Hill
to the corner of Market. Slipped through
the alley by the canal and let himself in.
Started to sweep
with terrible care, like a woman
brushing shine into her hair,
same motion, same lullaby.
No curtains—the cop on the beat
stopped outside once an hour
to swing his billy club and glare.

It was better on Saturdays
when the children came along:
he mopped while they emptied
ashtrays, clang of glass on metal
then a dry scutter. Next they counted
nailheads studding the leather cushions.
Thirty-four! they shouted,
that was the year
and they found it mighty amusing.

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But during the week he noticed more—
lights when they gushed or dimmed
at the Portage Hotel, the 10:32
picking up speed past the B & O switchyard,
floorboards trembling and the explosive
kachook kachook kachook kachook
and the oiled rails ticking underneath.

3.
They were poor then but everyone was poor.
He hadn't minded the sweeping,
just the thought of it—like now
when people ask him what he's thinking
and he says *I'm listening.*

Those nights walking home alone,
the bucket of coal scraps banging his knee,
he'd hear a roaring furnace
with its dry, familiar heat. Now the nights
take care of themselves—as for the days,

There is the canary's sweet curdled song,
the wino smiling through his dribble.
Past the hill, past the gorge
choked with wild sumac in summer,
the corner has been upgraded.
Still, he'd like to go down there someday
to stand for a while, and get warm.

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Wingfoot Lake

Independence Day, 1964

On her 36th birthday, Thomas had shown her
her first swimming pool. It had been
his favorite color, exactly—just
so much of it, the swimmers' white arms jutting
into the chevrons of high society.
She had rolled up her window
and told him to drive on, fast.

Now this *act of mercy*; four daughters
dragging her to their husbands' company picnic,
white families on one side and them
on the other, unpacking the same
squeeze bottles of Heinz, the same
waxy beef patties and Salem potato chip bags.
So he was dead for the first time
on Fourth of July—ten years ago

had been harder, waiting for something to happen,
and ten years before that, the girls
like young horses eyeing the track.
Last August she stood alone for hours
in front of the T.V. set
as a crow's wing moved slowly through
the white streets of government.
That brave swimming

scared her, like Joanna saying
Mother, we're Afro-Americans now!
What did she know about Africa?
Were there lakes like this one
with a rowboat pushed under the pier?
Or Thomas' Great Mississippi
with its sullen silks? (There was
the Nile but the Nile belonged

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to God.) Where she came from
was the past, 12 miles into town
where nobody had locked their back door,
and Goodyear hadn't begun to dream of a park
under the company symbol, a white foot
sprouting two small wings.

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Janet Flanner: Letters to a Friend

Janet Flanner, under the pen name of Genêt, began writing her fortnightly "Letter" for The New Yorker *in October, 1925, a few months after the magazine was founded. She had wanted to be a writer ever since she was a girl of five in Indianapolis, where she was born in 1892. When, on her fifth birthday, she was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" without hesitation she answered, "I want to be an author." Whereupon her mother asked her, "Can you spell it?" She missed the "u," she wrote later.*

Writing was her passion, her devotion, her constant work. After a brief career on the Indianapolis Star *as its first movie critic, she left America to live in Paris in the early twenties, with the intention of becoming "another Edith Wharton on the spot." Her assignment from* The New Yorker *was to report merely "what the French thought was going on in France," but she slowly added her own insight and taut analysis to what she saw, heard, and read, giving birth to that special brand of essay-reporting that made her famous. She lived for fifty years in France except for the war period, when she returned to the U.S. "The idea that I've become French would be ludicrous and impertinent," she answered an interviewer. "I don't believe one shifts one's breed easily. The first twenty years of one's life stamp one. . ."*

She had a great mop of bobbed silver hair, piercing brown eyes, a noble aquiline nose and a sensitive mouth that illuminated her face when talking or smiling. She was always smartly dressed in Chanel or Molineux tailored clothes or in a St. Laurent black pantsuit, with elegant French shoes—her particular pleasure—on her tiny feet, and bright scarves of which she was very fond. She smoked and read incessantly.

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She is the author of Cubical City, *a novel, published in 1926;* An American in Paris, *a profile of an interlude between two wars, drawn mainly from her* New Yorker *writings (1940);* Petain: The Old Man of France *(1944);* Men and Monuments, *art monographs (1957);* Paris Journal I, 1944–1965 *(1965), which won the 1965 National Book Award;* Paris Journal II, 1965–1971 *(1971);* Paris Was Yesterday, 1925–1939, *which drew on her* New Yorker *reportage from before the period of her* Journals *(1972);* London Was Yesterday, 1934–1939, *a selected collection of her London Letters which she alternated with her bi-weekly Paris Letters for a number of years (1975);* Janet Flanner's World: Uncollected Writings 1932–1975, *writings from other parts of the world (1979). She wrote her last "Letter from Paris" in September, 1975. In her last years she made her home in New York, where she died on November 7, 1978, at the age of eighty-six.*

Janet entered my life on a New York afternoon in early January, 1940. She was forty-eight years old; I was thirty-eight. She was an American who, in the twenties, had left her birthplace to live in France. I had left Rome, where I was born, to come to America, at about the same time.

She had divorced her husband and made a life for herself in Paris. I had acquired one, and made my life in New York, though by the time Janet and I met, Bill and I had gone our separate ways.

It was the combination of these elements – the Europeanized American and the Americanized European – that sparked our long and unique friendship. Janet found in France the tradition of beauty, art, and culture she so longed for in her Indiana days. I found in America a new climate of freedom, a new world with eyes turned toward the future, with every possibility open to a young woman who had seen the rise of Fascism in her own land and hated it.

As a famous journalist, Janet interpreted European people and events to American readers. I was interpreting the American way of life, its spirit and freedom, by broadcasting daily

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to my people under Fascism. Later I helped to establish a cultural bridge, as the head of the first New York office of the publisher Arnoldo Mondadori of Milan, which I represented for seventeen years. After that, I became the Vice-President of Rizzoli Editore Corporation in New York, for eleven more years. When we met, we were two independent working women, passionately involved in the political and historical events of the day, as well as in the events of our private lives.

It was in 1944 that Janet's "other letters" began. They continued throughout her life, during our long separations made necessary by work. Janet often wrote me after she had finished a Paris Letter, or a profile for The New Yorker. *She discussed*

Janet and Natalia on the Spanish Steps in Rome in June, 1949. At the time, Natalia was working in Rome as a free-lance writer; Janet used to come often to visit her from Paris, and wrote a number of "Letters from Rome" for The New Yorker.

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art shows, plays, books, people, and, often, our families. Her observations and comments, even gossip, are generally more personal, more emotional, more natural and easy than what she wrote for the magazine, sometimes violent, but never nasty or petty.

In rereading them, as I started putting my papers in order, I realized how unique our relationship was, worth sharing with the world not only for the value of the "letters" per se, but also as a demonstration of how two women surmounted obstacles, trying to lead personal and professional lives with dignity and feeling. I decided to collect her letters, and they will appear in a book, Darlinghissima: Letters to a Friend, *to be published by Random House in the fall of this year.*

—**Natalia Danesi Murray**

22-X-49

My darling,

Believe it or not, a chimney sweep is just coming in to clear the chimney of my room in this very quaint hotel. I hope he will wear a top hat, carry a witch's broom and talk cockney as in the times of Charles Dickens.

I am moving. I am rapturously pleased. I cannot get the room I have retained at the Hotel Continental till November 17. Tiny, in the roof, with a glorious view all over the horizon of Paris and the Tuileries gardens beneath, oh what a pleasure to have a vista of beauty; room newly painted, milk white, lovely new cherry-colored carpet, small elderly bathroom, only one big closet, two corner placards with rounded mirrors (rounded at top, Gothic fashion), sloping roof, the whole utterly picturesque, with a tiny balcony of zinc, a railing of narrow iron bars which must date from the second empire in style and with the mansard roof bulging up at either side. I fancy I could perhaps squeeze a deck chair there if I kept my knees under my chin.

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The price is slightly less than the Scribe, but I shall still be paying about $125 monthly for a room, a roof, a bath—but with beauty. I must work, my pet. Bless you, my treasure in any language.

15-XI-50

My darling, my friend,

One week ago yesterday I sailed. The sail fatigued me after my arrival Monday afternoon, and I went to the *New Yorker* office only Tuesday and Wednesday, each day all day. I think [Harold] Ross's wanting me to come here is this: he is convinced Europe is "lost" as he calls it to "the commies." Odd that he, such a patron of good writing and editing, should nickname Bolshevism so it sounds like a baseball team. He is troubled by my defense of socialism and says if it fails to be as bad as communism, then Blum was only an idle dreamer who failed while dreaming and not applying it. All this came out in a gentle but intense short conversation at "21" restaurant where I had dined with [William] Shawn and wife on Wednesday night. Ross, having dined upstairs with others and having come down for coffee with me, the Shawns having left, their twins being ill of bad colds. So far, that is the only meaning of my arrival, that and his almost helpless insistence that I've got to witness the turnover here, how fast things are changing, as if it were a spectacle he can't understand, and I, too, must look at it almost like something ugly which I must share as a penance.

Shawn spoke almost the same way, but with more youthful humor. Shawn looks very well as well as a little fatter. Ross is thin but "mellower." That's the office word for it. All use it, meaning he is less violent. The payoff in my opinion was in my first accidental meeting with him in the office corridor (although he knew I had arrived). He stuck out his cheek to be kissed and said, "Well, goddamn it, we're so busy with the Christmas week on the magazine that I've been thinking it over and I guess you should have come *after* Christmas." I was staggered but laughed and said, "That's something you should have thought of sooner, say last summer, when you told me to come

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in August" . . . I am very nervous here, as New York air is tense and the food, darling, is actually nauseating. Dinner for three last night at Tony's Wife was $15.00—good prosciutto, very *bad* scaloppine al marsala, bad espresso, bottle red Chianti, rather sour. Prices are awful—$7.50 a day for bad, ugly little single room here.

I shall see [Wolcott] Gibbs' show Wednesday matinee (*Season in the Sun*) and write you. Office very happy at his success but no one understands jocularity of play as subject very bad, and only one good comedy character in it. There are no tickets available until after Christmas for *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, *South Pacific*, etc. I shall ask Terry* to ask for scalper's prices. *Call Me Madam* (Ethel Merman) sold out, of course, poorish music, not much fun, all say. There is a kind of *energy* that has seized things here. *The Lady's Not for Burning* opened yesterday: I enclose notice.

I deeply apologize for this dry, grotesque letter. The shock of the energy, beauty, and ugliness of the city has deflated me. I shall write lengthily about Fire Island. It is still warm, gentle and sunny here. I miss you and feel very strange.

The dogma in 1950 of Assumption Virgin which is idiotic but with lovely lights and flowers seemed more *normal* to me than New York does, darlingest one, honestly.

26-XI-51

. . . I find E. M. Forster's *Two Cheers for Democracy* one of the most stimulating, clear, delightfully strong collections of essays I have read in years; you would be enchanted by them. One can read them with speed and joy, with profit, with nourishment. Bill [Natalia's son, William Murray] would love them, too.

I saw a strange play tonight, Jean Louis Barrault playing Lazarus at the Marigny. Lazarus is, of course, furious with Jesus for dragging him back to life, though he doesn't mention the agony of having to die twice, which must be considered I should think. Then in act two—it has only two acts—Jesus, who talks

* Daise E. Terry, office manager at *The New Yorker*.

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against death as the great evil, makes him love life again as a second miracle, then himself goes out to die in a couple of weeks, he says. Very odd; the period of the play is medieval. No reference to the East, to Jerusalem of the period of Christ's birth. He and Judas who is the agnostic in a way and Matthew are dressed in sort of monk's clothes, the others in medieval garments. It was the second critics' night, great enthusiasm, about fifteen curtain calls.

No letter from you for days. Do not choke on Fleur Cowles' emeralds if eating her sandwiches at her parties. What wealth still exists there, which even we can touch by seeing on the outskirts. I am so completely cut off from fashionable or elegant life here that I probably don't know what French luxury is like. I only know that fortunes are being made and never spent prettily, in public at least.

16-V-52

. . . I have not quite had time to pick up after myself, on arriving; I still have one valise to unpack. I did the others pronto, but became drowned in work, appointments, the Congress activities, ballet for two nights in succession, a third tonight, a press meeting with the writers this noon, a cocktail with Fleischmann* in an hour. Stravinsky had an ovation last night as he came out to conduct his *Orphée*, given its first audition in New York last winter; after the ballet built on it, very stately slow ugliness of the new style of 1925 when *la laideur était à la mode ici*, with almost laughable costumes by Noguchi. Stravinsky himself did almost a *danse*, a sort of easy-toed, bear-like gallop off stage, after receiving frenzied plaudits for his music which was genial, agreeable, rather mystic and rich, and nothing like *Petroutscka* of the old days. But Jerome Robbins' Pied Piper—a clarinet in any alley to whose playing (he sat on stage, merely a regular clarinetist on a stool, the part having been written for Benny Goodman) all the neighborhood youths came flocking in pairs to dance, finally ending up on a

* Raoul Fleischmann, owner of *The New Yorker*.

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Janet snapped this picture of Frank Merlo, Natalia Murray, and Tennessee Williams at Natalia's house on Fire Island in July, 1961.

Janet Flanner with William Murray, Natalia's son, who, at the time of this photograph, (in the early '40's) wanted to be an opera singer. William is now a writer for The New Yorker *and is writing the authorized biography of Janet Flanner.*

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sort of boogie-woogie—that pulled down the house. Parisians went closer to violence of enthusiasm than ever I saw here before. The *esprit de corps de ballet* is astonishing, such perfection of training, far better than when I saw them in New York for some mysterious reason.

Nora Kaye terrific, also [Maria] Tallchief, the men very dainty and adequate, but not outstanding which the women are by physical height literally, and real grace and perfect technique and rehearsing. The ballet has, along with terrible chauvinistic cracks, the best critique of all the Congress events. Lots of sheer bitchery, some new, some inherited from other days of quarrels between Paris artists such as Chagall complaining about Balanchine not exactly following his sketches for decors and costumes, though in New York they had been used for years and he never peeped, so Balanchine simply cut out the *Firebird* of Stravinsky which featured the Chagall sets, a great loss in music to many, etc., etc.

I am grateful that nearly nothing—indeed nothing of importance—is new or demanding of critique by me. All I have to report is what the French criticize, which is lots. I never knew Paris so full of events, films (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, scrap stories by [René] Clair, [Roberto] Rosselini, etc.).

16-V-1952

. . . Last night was the first of the writers' talk*, and they talked much too much, from nine to twelve, and I nearly went to sleep. They did NOT say anything very fascinating. William Faulkner did arrive and received a big ovation from the public, at the final literary debate, but he merely said a few words about how American muscles and French brains could form the coming cultural world and then he sat down.

12-X-52

. . . Carson [McCullers] turned up yesterday with Reeves, [her husband], both drinking multiple glasses of water from my bathroom. Their house is on an acre and a half of garden

* The Writers Conference of the Congress of Cultural Freedom, in Paris.

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in the *ancienne presbytère* of Bachvillers, town of two hundred, in the Oise, about twenty miles east of Gisors. . . . Carson constantly carries her paralyzed left hand in her right, like a headless chicken, so distressing. Reeves says she has no lateral vision in the left eye and thus balance is impaired. She used her left hand held aloft like a sight on a gun to aim where she is going. Tragic. . . .

The town is full of tourists. Mother of one chap in the embassy ruined his reputation the other night by saying of the Louvre, "Well, I declare, it's just the biggest bank building I ever did see." She also said that the difference between Paris and New York was that in New York you couldn't tell the difference between the rich and the poor, but in Paris the rich drove big cars, and the poor drove the little ones, so you could see the difference.

Hot, warm, balmy here. The owls in the garden and I, too, were both up until two last night, working at our respective life tasks.

XII-1957

Friday, My darlinghissima, carissima,

President Eisenhower should be rolling into Paris in a few hours today, unfortunate man. It seems almost fortunate that he suffers now from aphasia. Perhaps this will prevent his saying some of the useless, evangelical, uneducated and unadult statements which his administration has specialized in, especially in a crisis. In Nixon we clearly have another illiterate in the semi-saddle; the specimens of his thinking, expressed in his own language, as given for a whole pageful here in the *Herald Tribune* alarmed me; he also cannot speak the King's English accurately, uses words in slightly wrong or even totally mistaken contexts, the latter especially when he is trying to talk impressively. Alas, our poor country. Belief in advertising has taken the form of faith. Belief in getting rich quick has replaced the hope and knowledge of democracy as a new politic by which men could improve their lot. Belief in shortcuts has taken the place of belief in study and education so that we are uneducated and cannot study.

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As Jan [Flanner's nephew] answered me when I said, "What play of Shakespeare's are you studying this year?" "Shakespeare! Why, we wouldn't stand for that!" A man named Robbins who is apparently Vice President of National Foods or whatever that corporation is called, is here to give a look into all the U.S.I.S. [United States Information Service] establishments in France, and Freddy Pane suggested he talk to me to have my opinion (I, knowing nothing about any except one recently opened here in Paris where a Negro man has been appointed as our representative, with a French girl; a damn good idea). Robbins is nice, handsome and intelligent for a millionaire, but his opening statement was, "Why should we have to approach the French on what is called the cultural basis; everybody knows we are cultured." I said, "I didn't know it and don't believe it, either. That is the main cause of our unpopularity which you had just inquired about."

He had told Marjorie Ferguson [the U.S.I.S. Chief in Paris] that he had "done" the Louvre in twenty minutes. His wife reproved him so he did not repeat that to me. I was sorry as I was "laying" for him! My conclusion after seeing Nixon's verbal style, after Ike's, is that one has to pass an illiteracy test, and pass it with very high marks, too, to be allowed to vote the Republican ticket.

10-X-58

. . . I've just had bathroom water and Ballantine's scotch which someone left me half a bottle of . . . oh, the Thurbers. We had lovable times for nearly two months in the hotel, excepting one evening at a dinner party when Jamie became violent and insulting about Ross and *The New Yorker*, but that too was as pathetic as it was revolting. His memory is the only organ he has left to guide him and in his darkness, his ego has developed like a fatal light. It is he, not Ross, who was the guiding lamp on the magazine in the early days. . . .

Yesterday, before I took [Pavelich] Tchelichew's sister to Bernstein's concert, I stood on my balcony viewing the lovely chromes, in chromatic gammes (forgive pun) in the leaves of the Tuileries, not yet fallen from the trees. I had lunched with L [Leonard

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Bernstein] and his darling Felicia the day before at a charming fish restaurant directly opposite to the Tour Eiffel. We talked until four, then met again at Alice Toklas' rooms, where they met her and saw her pictures. (Doda Conrad brought them. Really, those Poles are pluperfect *maître d'hôtels*; why didn't they ask me to take them? She is a thousand times more my intimate darling friend than he.) I wanted to take them after to Lee Miller's cocktail party in the Place Dauphine nearby, with her husband, Roland Penrose, whose new book on Picasso, after ten years' work, has just come out but they had to dine with Mlle. [Nadia] Boulanger.

Well, the vesper Pleyel concert of Bernstein yesterday was really riotous. He seems not to know, nor did I tell him afterwards in the green room, that Parisians applaud like pugilists, battering their hands, for anything foreign. He must have had perhaps thirty or forty curtain calls. It was as extravagant as his programme, direction and also solo piano playing of concertos by Bach, Mozart, Ravel, then Gershwin's blues in which latter he misses as many top notes, I said to a discreet male musical friend, as if he had been Rubinstein himself. In the green room he said he had never been so nervous before a concert. I had trembled as he began his Bach, took courage with his Mozart (exquisite, poetic, *la seule réussite*), was brave and too fast in his Ravel, and banged right and left in the Gershwin of which Iturbi, it may please you to know my darling, is still considered here as having given the finest performance.

Leonard's reviews have been as phenomenal as he is. We talked of our supper table with you at Lillian's [Lillian Hellman]. I love you, I am hungry, going alone to dine, having not lunched, my hearing is *greatly* ameliorated, smoke not more than ten cigarettes a day (which affect arterial tension), and my heart is yours which affects its amorous tension, the only blood stream of love which poets have yet traced. Forgive this awkward tender letter, which is ill-written by the brain, physically refined by the sentiment. Write me, darling, in a non-businessman's letter.

28-VI-59

. . . Gypsy [Rose Lee] is here (also Marc Blitzstein, seeing

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him and Miss Lee Thursday, also Virgil [Thomson], for drinks). She is funnier than ever, funnier stories, which she acts out, half-dressed in her room, with son Eric and some albino actor who seems to be chauffeur-handyman for her Rolls Royce, en route to Rome, then Yugoslavia, because has never been there. She is always a burden, bless her heart. She has arrived with fifteen-millimeter films she took *en voyage* and in France en route from Le Havre. Wants them developed in twenty-four hours, also sound track shifted to tape recorder, to send to NBC to Jack Paar. If good enough, she will send more, to be paid for, to be used in her absence on his program. All this she wanted done between Friday night and Tuesday night. She leaves Wednesday for Rome. Impossible, of course, though I had to make as many useless phone calls for her, to offices that didn't answer, as if there was a chance. Finally I have suggested she look up Franca [Natalia's sister] in Rome who will, of course, adore her, for your sake as well. Ask Franca where to have film sound and tape printed or whatever, some in color naturally, to make it harder. This she has accepted. Is phoning Franca tomorrow, Monday night.

. . . You can imagine all the phoning I have done in the midst of a Paris letter. Also, Gypsy has ordered new corsets and shoes from her special corsetier and bottier, bringing back old shoes to be recopied, new shoes he made wrong last year—I cannot TELL you the complications, especially with her French! Last night she had a nightmare, dreamed her house was on fire, her animals burned, and also Eric her son. At one A.M. she phoned the desk downstairs, asking where the fire escape was. She had had a nightmare about her son and animals burning in New York. The man at the desk became alarmed, shouted, "Fire? Ees zis hotel en fire, mon dieu, ow much damages is your room burned?" It took an hour to make him understand she had only dreamed all this. Then he told her dreaming of fire was "verrreee verrreee looky." Lucky—and she took a sleeping pill. My God, they will probably never let her in here again, though I had to use pressure this time. Hotels all packed, especially as this hotel has no fire escapes. Apparently she also told the desk man that the staircase (which she had inspected in

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her nightie) was made of wood. "Oh yes, madame, verreee fine wooood, ma'oganneee.") It must have been a riot.

I must get back to work IF I can. I thought we were dining tonight, but as they didn't find me in the bar at six—it is closed on Sunday—they tootled out, had high tea, cheese, God knows what, so now after laughing an hour I shall dine alone. She is the funniest, drollest woman on earth, a wonderful friend, and I adore her. Next time she comes, I am going to hire an office staff, a hypnotizer, somebody from the Folies Bergère to give corseting advice and a large French fireman with a bucket outside her door.

19-V-1960

. . . At this moment, it's our country wrong. [Douglas] Duncan, the photographer who took those marvelous photos of the Kremlin jewels, was here in my bar to see the [John] Gunthers day before yesterday with a special copy of his magnificent book bound in orange leather with the Russian arms in gold, a special copy for Mr. K [Khrushchev], there being one just like it for Ike, too, he said, but he won't give K his copy because how can you give a gift like that to a man who has called your president a liar? I said, well, wasn't he a liar? What's that got to do with the book? No, he says, it *has* to do with the book. I don't feel friendly to him because one must stand up for one's own. I said even for a president who has acted like an imbecile? Yes, he said, "He's like a loony old father who has lost his mind, but we have to take care of him." Et voilà.

The boos that greeted K as he walked in were terrific. He turned scarlet, then caught himself deftly and, on hearing some applause (from French communists), applauded his hands, too. This somewhat calmed down the crowd, but it repeatedly booed. The Khrushchev press conference yesterday from 3:00 exactly until 5:18 was the most worrying and indeed frightening experience I have had in listening to a chief of state since Hitler. K acted alternatively crazy with anger and fury, then like a clown, being cute, then like a great leader making decisions, then like a ritualist talking doctrine . . . he could have been killed any

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minute, and every minute of those two hours. We all had journalist's badges on, but anybody could borrow them. I myself wore one for two days that said on it Roberts, *Newsweek*, until they made me one in my own name at my insistence. There were many Hungarians in the big hall where he spoke. Anybody could have assassinated him and Duncan had his camera ready, saying if it happens, I shall picture it. K's energy, anger, endurance, riposte, vitality above all, were such that at the end he won a grudging respect for his physical qualities at least, though was despised too for his coarseness in pushing his *jeu* too far, though why not? He is like that just as Ike is like whatever it is he is, a baldheaded, elderly, brainless head of state with reputation for honesty now besmirched by a foolish lie, not an intelligent one but a silly one. . . .

I am convinced that this has been the lowest point this last week in our national history, like a table filled with broken, dirty dishes, like a mixture of poverty of mind and remnants of wasted luxurious food, great gluttonous pieces of cake which, by wasting, give us the sense of power that comes with money and an arrogant belly, and with that the stink of vulgarity of mind as the party has closed, with the echo of the foolish babble and braggadocio, the uncertain drunken steps in the hall, the loud patriotic belches. I am sick at heart.

12-VII-60

Dearest,

. . . I have been undergoing melodramas here because of my poor friend Nancy Cunard who has been certified for lunacy and shut up in a very liberal lunatic asylum in England, near Windsor. Over the past two months in London, she had been arrested several times, first for soliciting on the street which is an absurd policeman's error I feel sure. She was doubtless trying to pick up men merely to talk to them. Then in her drunkenness she attacked the police who tried to take her in charge after fights in bars. As for the magistrate who committed her to Holloway Jail for medical attention and treatment, she threw her shoes in the magistrate's face! It is all squalid, un-

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believable, yet as I look back has been true for years. She has been wild with hatred and hostilities for years, her own semi-poverty has embittered and unbalanced her, and I feel she has taken over all the injustices meted out to her Spanish friends. Spain seems to be the first fly-wheel in her political reactions which have aided in unbalancing her, and now it's America.

When Raymond Mortimer arrived last week to visit her, he wrote me that she said, "It is America which has unjustly confined me here." And when I tell you her Spanish friends are all anarchists, you may be sure they have had plenty of persecution, police cruelty, and rank injustice as part of their protest and suffering. These sufferings and injustices she has taken over as her personal burden, I feel. I think they have inflamed her hates, hostilities, and anti-Christian ethic until she is socially mad, mentally not always.

It is a very liberal lunatic asylum indeed. She is allowed to go walking alone, which allowed her to phone long distance three times the day before yesterday to beg me to give ten pounds sterling to some Spanish youth arriving here to aid him to go on to London, "and to come to me," apparently at the asylum. Fortunately he arrived twice at my hotel while I was not here. I still have the ten one-pound notes I bought at the bank. Her idea, Raymond just told me, is to ADOPT HIM! He is to pretend he is her cousin! He is a very young working man, the concierge here tells me, speaks no language but Spanish; was able to print his name as identification to leave for me adding, "*de parte de Mis Nanci Cunart*," which she probably finds adorable, such semi-illiteracy. Apparently she has been crazy about him for two years, but it all seemed so fantastic that the doctors thought it a delusion. Stupid. All her delusions are her own truths.

I made four phone calls to England yesterday. Raymond made two to me, to try to plan how to head off this youth from attempting to get to London and then to her asylum where it seems clear she plans to flee with him. However, the boy has not appeared since his first two calls in my absence. I think he got in only from someone else and is now being turned back by the English immigration authorities, I am sure.

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Roger Senhouse, her publisher, had to appear before the court to certify her lunacy. She was perfectly clearheaded on the phone with me and said, "I am not allowed to sign checks, but you will be refunded." I think Senhouse manages her money by court order. Now she has quarreled with her own doctor, a brilliant medico and friend of thirty years, because he believed the Holloway Prison authorities' report of her conduct in the first ten days she was sentenced there, when they could not find any of her friends. This seems strange, indeed. Apparently she acted the true lunatic and rebel, tore off buttons from her clothes, raged with vile obscene insults, etc. She has always so tempered her wild violences in her relations with me that they have only been legends to me. Now they are truths, legally and indisputably.

. . . The rain which has fallen for three weeks may have stopped, judging by the sky . . . no, clouds are already appearing. The followers of that looney messiah at Mont Blanc who says the end of the world is coming tomorrow, as Jehovah's Witnesses have been saying in California, have seemed to have an item in their favor—this constant rain, supposed to become a deluge tomorrow. . . . Kisses. Love. Depression, but humor too, for the Comedie Humaine is sometimes explosively comic. Even Nancy Cunard. Even Lumumba. He sounds like something from Edward Lear or Alice in Wonderland or some tragic black-skinned Gilbert & Sullivan piece with tomtom music and satire played as bloody reality. Yours ever, into the increasing communizing of our world. As the planner and doers and world shakers, they advance.

P.S. Some of Nancy Cunard's letters are absolutely as of old, brilliant, sharp as well as sane, others are very unhinged, wild with furies as always, yet peculiar, a quality that is spread then in all directions, then upheaved, then hot, then cold—At this present time of life, she is sometimes mad, but with a home or husband or family to have controlled her—though who could?—she would have been spared a lunatic asylum no matter how liberal, as hers is.

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19-X-60

. . . I dined last night with Mme. Nathalie Sarraute. Being born Russian, she will always seem to us Westerners loosened from our sense of reality, a kind of middle-aged child. She said only Marguerite Duras who wrote the scenario of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* had any importance among the twenty-five now indicted who signed the manifesto, the others all being minor people no one ever heard of, so when tried in court they will be of no consequence or use to the cause. What snobbery exists even in martyrdom!

14-XI-1966

. . . I am going to tea this afternoon at five to see old Natalie Barney, Remy de Gourmont's Amazon, in her old house and garden in the rue Jacob. Germaine Beaumont will be there too, and one or two academicians still able to walk with canes. She has grown very, very thin, Germaine told me. I lunched with her. First time in two years, but her mind at the age of ninety

Masked revelers assembled at Monroe Wheeler's dinner party before going on to Truman Capote's Black and White Ball—which was held at the Plaza Hotel on November 28, 1966. Janet wore a dress that she had had made specially in Paris. Pictured (l—r) are Monica Stirling, Virgil Thomson, Natalia Murray, Glenway Wescott, Janet Flanner, Anita Loos, and Monroe Wheeler.

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is as alert as ever, wonderful. As I said to Germaine, lesbians lead such healthy lives, no childbirths, abortions, or miscarriages.

6-IV-67

Beloved, What welcome, wonderful, joyous news. We shall have at least two days together here in Paris after you finish your Rizzoli stint, three maybe if you can cheat a trifle. On the strength of it, I shall try to have a new suit made at Chanel to change my appearance, but shall carry a large pancarte in my hand saying, "THIS IS YOURS," as identification of my person.

I wrote a *good* Paris Letter this week, one of my best in a long time, and have had Wallace Shawn here for two days, intelligent, gentle, logical, unpressed, unkempt, but a darling youth, with a voice with a note or two something like his father's and a remote shape here or there in his homely face of his mother's perennial prettiness. I walked two hours on the Paris quais with him yesterday, took two meals with him and this morning am a fraction weary, but shall lunch again to carry it off all well.

Yesterday, the wretched Vice President Humphrey received riot treatment down the street from my balcony while Wallace and I watched. Three or four thousand communist students, French—not Americans—demonstrated before the embassy with placards and shouts of "Johnson Assassin, Go home Hooomphrey." Very difficult to make out at first and "paix aux Vietnam" and "U.S.A. Assassins" for good measure. It is painful and I admit it to be the member of so unceasingly unpopular a country. Often you and I as demi-Europeans both have discussed it. We, the Americans, seem to take too long to mature, being shut off by the Atlantic from our education in Europe, scholars who would have to swim for two hundred years to have participated, since in 1776 we were moving with splendid force and scholastic ignorance toward another direction and shore, toward the West, with its appeal of prosperity. Liberty plus the pleasure men find in slaughtering a young, minor race, those noble Indians, and eventually the discovery of yet one more Protestant faith, Mormonism, in a desert, and finally the dis-

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covery of blessed black oil, to take the place of Prometheus' more antique flame.

Am going to drive Wallace up to see the statue of George Washington, painted red by the students who yesterday burned an American flag near it, taken from the American cathedral church near by. He is so sickened when he sees a reference in the papers to Vietnam that he refuses to read any papers at all except at Oxford.

I don't at all understand the huge Snow White piece by [Donald] Barthelme, Bill's new favorite I understand, in the magazine two weeks ago. Did your Bill like it? Ask him, please. I did NOT understand one thing at all in it; its humor, satire and meaning escaped my eyes and mind.

Left: Janet Flanner with Mary McCarthy at Noel Murphy's house in Orgeval, France in the late sixties. Right: Janet Flanner with Walter and Helen Lippmann at their house in Bar Harbor, Maine in August, 1971. The photograph was taken by Natalia Murray.

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Am reading the first volume on Proust by [George D.] Painter. Enjoying it in a middling fashion; what a distorted youth Proust was. Am glad I read Lord Russell's memoirs—how uneven, how intimate physically, yet how far from intimacy with the reader today, a question of mind and of taste. His candor about his sexual relations is bracing in so old and so famed a philosopher. The great thing was his mental hunger, his tremendous searching, his sense of decision on the world and man, so unlike the shapeless youth of today Wallace tried to explain to me, those who say, "Well, it doesn't really make much difference what you do; it is not important since nothing is of consequence and we don't believe in history. It bores us."

10-V-67

Darlinghissima,

. . . I think Mary McCarthy's Vietnam pieces are the most acute analyses anyone has written of our national mentality and shameless euphemisms of our do-good vocabulary, and what the doing turns out to be in the way of wretchedness, defoliation, crops ruined, children burned by napalm bombs, and a new form of concentration refugee camp, with occasional PC rations and no plumbing as usual. I read parts two and three today and have been sunk in a most profound miasma of shock and humiliation for our country, pride in her work and discernment and clear analytical brain. She told me she had a letter from Walter Lippmann saying her pieces were "superb." Praise from him and to her runs on the highest possible communication level.

I keep wondering how Stalin's daughter happened to promise her book to Harper's. Had she a literary agent already before leaving Moscow? I wonder how you have come out in this highway robber competition for the foreign rights. There is something disloyal to the whole Soviet theses in what she has done and doubly—her defection from her own land of which her father was the tyrant and leader, then her selling her memoirs like a movie star, and she from a country which forbad Pasternak to enjoy the Nobel prize money. I know this may sound strict, applied by my midwestern ignorant sense of political logic, but

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put in another way it sounds better. I feel that YOU would never have done what she has done. There is proof that communism was right perhaps, that capitalism has its dingy, crass, glittering, mean spirit when money alone so clearly and triumphantly tempts her, with her past, to join in the investor's future. . . .

8-XII-67

. . . Like a miracle the end of my sciatica attack was almost synchronized with your voice on the phone. I was stricken at the question put to Shirley [Hazzard], "What has *The New Yorker* not contributed to American literature?" because I had to sit and think to find out if I agreed. I do, in a way. It has contributed writing, such as [E. B.] White's, and his pieces which are pure Americana. We have published enough short stories by that man I dislike and can't recall his name who writes about Pennsylvania, writes too well, too, and how about Thurber as part of American literature, also [Edmund] Wilson, the dullard? Too little of McCarthy, but [J.D.] Salinger counts, doesn't he? We haven't had the great Jewish novelists like [Saul] Bellow and Irwin Shaw, the Merde School, etc. I suppose there we have failed. But the shock of reading that query and knowing I was not sure of the answer when all these decades I have been so proud of writing for *The New Yorker*, as if for THE BEST, that I almost fell to pieces morally. It was a helpful shock. It has made me stop and think and be more modest than ever. I told Jo Wechsberg about it. He turned up yesterday with the amazing news that Shawn WANTS a profile on Rizzoli, as Jo said, "Dese condittiori Italian types are all de rage, ja? More fascinating dan de Amurrican go-getters."

22-II-68

. . . Did you see the last Sunday *London Observer* with the last chapter of [Michael] Holroyd's biography of Lytton Strachey, and the one before? I never saw the word homosexual repeated so often in print as in that next-to-the-last chapter. EVERYONE at Cambridge with any brains or lineage was a homo, even [John Maynard] Keynes. He and Lytton were in love with the same

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Janet Flanner, Berenice Abbott, Kay Boyle, and Lillian Hellman at the banquet honoring them at the Women in the Arts in the Twenties conference at Rutgers University, April 8, 1972. After the meal, there was a try-out production of "Paris Was Yesterday," a one-woman show by Paul Shyre based on Janet's collected New Yorker *writings. The production was held at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick, New Jersey, shortly before it opened in New York.*

yellow-haired boy. Strachey's final comment was fantastic: "If this is death," he whispered, "I don't think very much of it," and shortly after drew his last breath.

I must go and dine, alone as usual, and then work on my Paris Letter tonight. I can only thank God I can still work. Or should I say I am sorry?

I am reading a life of Flaubert. It is very dull, poor man. I think geniuses often have such confusing existences that joy escapes them except in its wilder forms. We have known that, too, without being burdened by genius either, so we are fortunate, my own.

21-VI-68

My darling one,

Thank you for your last letter with its serious, intelligent

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analyses of youth everywhere, moral sickness, murder, Kennedys dead, cataclysms abounding. Is it because in the western hemisphere this is the first time that Christianity has truly lost authority over the majority of Christians? God and Jesus and the Church are the first lost links in the life of the young; the Protestant God went first into New England theology and the Catholic God of Europe has lost much of the gilt from his throne that sparkled in belief.

This past month has been the most shocking I have known in my long years in France. The callous destruction of property, so unlike the sou-conscious French, made the students seem like barbarians; only the peasants in the countryside seem as shocked as I by the burning of people's cars left on the streets, as careless as that economy was; three or four more cars were burned two nights ago, long after the riots had been forbidden. The car owners now threaten to sue the city; a fine chance they have of winning since nobody knows even who burned them. It is a good thing there is to be the first leg of an election on Sunday. It props up public interest a little, though nobody ardently believes in party governments any more, and I note with sadness that in Rome the government is having trouble and in Venice the students are rioting against the Biennale which I don't blame them for, as the art shown is no better than of late years.

What has happened to the students' organisms is something like nausea and colic; they vomit up everything, they loose it through their bowels into the toilets of the cities, museums. Nothing seems to nourish them; everything is roughage except the early classic arts in Greece or Italy and those they are too out of touch with to reach and consume again, through the eyes at least if not the spirit. The people, including little children three years old, and the physical rubbish that came out of the Odeon when it was "cleaned" were appalling. It was like the Sorbonne, a kind of flop-house for tramps, foreigners, syphilitic mothers and cheap prostitutes, all infected. The photos of these girls with scrubbing brushes and brooms washing the Odeon classic porch were strange. They looked ashamed to be

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there, though had never shown shame before while living there like tramps, at whose invitation? The students. And they think they can run education and theaters and governments even, no doubt, with their ignorance of technique, discipline and exactitude.

Ils ne sont que des clochards, like the men lying under the Paris bridges on sunny days, delousing themselves. Violence has become an international portion of entertainment on stage and screen, and two Kennedys have paid with their lives for being shot In Cold Blood, like a male pair of Bonnies and Clydes who *at least* were bank robbers in a good cause. . . .

This is a letter filled with anger. It is like your anger, my darling. Please don't fail to come to Italy next month, please, please.

17-V-69

My love,

. . . I had cocktails at the Hôtel Maurice with the Lippmanns yesterday. Gave them your telephonic love. Walter understands no more than you or I as to why the young are all gone mad. He is as disgusted as we. Twice he turned his head toward the light in such a way that I cried, "Walter, you look just like your *Herald Tribune* photograph," and I wish I saw it thrice weekly as over years.

This morning bad news from the Berkeley campus with rioting and the guards firing salt at the students. . . .

28-XI-69

Darling one,

This week's *New Yorker* has a very fine Washington Letter by [Richard] Rovere, of large intelligence on the administration, Nixon, et al., another proof of what fine reporting we turn in quite often. The "Casualties of War" of course, by Dan Lang, has made history. I am proud for him and for Shawn who must have suffered to accept and to print so brutal and painful a report on Army conduct. It seems to be that never has the country been so low in its morality as practiced by people who

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actually know better. On top, money is the most desirable commodity, and at the bottom pornography and lewdness make the solid base on which entertainment and humor function. I worry about the U.S., because it is, it seems to me, obviously headed for some kind of self-treachery in which it will betray itself beyond redemption, which will take more time than we would ever give to restoring morality, taste or honesty. Your descriptive phrase in your letter about the astronauts marching around in the moon dust like Petrouchka figures, costing us all a million dollars a step, seemed to me memorable. The astronauts are highly educated in their technique and self-control, but are uncultivated in every way, those voices, those slang, meager, cheap phrases, not a word of historic simplicity or worth or poetry, nothing except variants of "Oh boy, did we hit it good." I was ashamed of them, of their poverty of appreciation. Christians they may be, but not familiar with the verbiage of the Bible, or they would have had more words and phrases of noble recollection to cover their own poverty of thought. . . .

5-XII-69

Darling,

It is cold today in a pleasant, physical way; the cold makes one's skin burn, so one is dually warmed and chilled, like baked Alaska pudding. Your letter was splendid in its report of your soul and experiences, apropos of the magazine. Soon we shall have talks in New York in the living room at night or at the breakfast Saturday mornings. I see your geographic position as an emigrée in America, a normal civic situation in which you have ripened; there seems no normalcy for me, born there but despising my locality. Perhaps had I been born a New Yorker with privileges of seeing beauty I would not have turned into a geographic rebel.

Ernest [Hemingway] was not one to begin with, but became one. Italians long to return to their "paese" because they recall it as lovely. He did not yearn for the beauties of Michigan in the autumn, the only season the Middle West is handsome with its Signac-like stripes of colored leaves of different shades of yellow, red, and brown, with forests as gay as flags. That motor

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trip you and I took on the tops of the mountains en route from Washington to New York was a palette revelation, a journey for a painter, not a citizen necessarily.

I am very confused in my likes and dislikes now, upset by my own ignorance of what I truly feel. All you say about your own people, the Italians, I feel too. They would not murder children and old people. Do you recall that I said they remained civilized by love and the passion for beauty during their dark ages when education was only for priests or occasionally princes? Do you recall the scene that night you and I were walking back down to Capri from the Roman emperor's ruin and we came to an inn lighted for wine on the second floor, where a young father came in holding his first born, "a beautiful little girl. Think of the pleasure she will later give others in her life." That is the civilization of love. . . .

Janet on the balcony of her room at the Ritz, her favorite hotel, where she lived from 1969 to 1975, after spending twenty years at the Hotel Continental (which had been bought and redone by PanAm, and renamed The Intercontinental). "The shabbiness of the Ritz is a great comfort after the garish modernism of the Intercontinental," she wrote.

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Five Poems by Jean Sénac

Introductory Note

Poet, champion of Algerian independence, gay rights activist before his time, Jean Sénac was born near Oran in 1926 and died, victim of an unknown assassin, martyr to an unknown cause, in 1973. He published his first poem at the age of sixteen, and soon became involved in both French and Algerian literary communities. In 1950 he met René Char (whom he would come to consider his "master") and Albert Camus, like him a pied noir, *who called Sénac* "mi hijo." *Returning to Algeria, he founded a literary-political journal and entered into contact with leading Algerian nationalists. In 1954 he broke with Camus over the issue of Algerian nationalism, even as his*

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first book-length collection, published in Paris, established him as a major voice among French-speaking Arab writers.

Under Ben Bella he was appointed to the Ministry of Education and made General Secretary of the Union of Algerian Writers. But Sénac, who was neither Muslim nor truly an Arab, who wrote in the language of the French oppressors and counted many friends among them, and who openly avowed his homosexuality, quickly came to be seen as a political liability for the ultra-Islamic regime. He resigned from the Union; his readings on Radio Algeria were banned; and though he continued to meet and encourage many young poets, he was denied any kind of official recognition.

On September 4, 1973, the press reported that Sénac had been found stabbed in his apartment. The official explanation was "murder during a robbery." But the alleged "murderer" (a friend of Sénac's) was soon acquitted, and many feel to this day that Jean Sénac was assassinated by a political entity which, in the final account, had found him too free for its rigid notions of independence.

The following poems are from a posthumous collection, Dérisions et vertige (1967–1972), *published in 1983 by Actes Sud publishers, Arles.*

—M.P.

Young Deluge

K.T. from Oran

1.
And here I am wondering about a simple hesitation in
your ankles,
an unruly lock, a cracked note.
I explore your landscapes—estranged bride,
not yet nubile and already a wheel of flame.
I wonder while, heel on my
shoulder, you take leave of
fire.

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2.
Nothing.
About you I know only
the weight of a little ink in a bookseller's stall
and the rumbling of
keg-laden trucks on a ramp.
(Curved wood and the dregs of
childhood you lead me to.
Oh, to know nothing.
—I'll call your name when your thighs
in hurried strokes weigh blue on the poem
you dredge from my body.)
I'll call your name.

3.
Approach of negation.
From thought rip the froth of tigresses.
Cull words from their own dung.
Don't close your eyes when your twin thrusts
his tongue in up to the letter A.
A deluge can surge
when you expected just a nursery rhyme;
amid the watercress
a fifth season can take the sky by storm.

—*Pointe-Pescade, 24/26 April 1967.*

Legend

First you saw the sun
with its five fingers,
all the blue of the sea
and the pleasure of tents. You saw
dazzling idleness (sleep and joy),
the leisure of words, and confidence.
You saw

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the thistle—but on such a vast horizon!
And never death
in these sheets:
just a youthful body,
the nib of a pen.

You saw combat, denial,
but never in this wound the rolling of dunes,
God like a discarded crumb, man
in his undertakings, always set against his excrement.

You saw the song,
the ejaculation,
the rose.

But oh, solitude,
they didn't see
your steely sea urchin
caught within my lines.

—Algiers, 6 May 1970.

Ode to Cernuda

Cursed be the language I speak.
Cursed my country and cursed my people.
Cursed be the moment when, marked by the marginal stone,
I emerged here. Cursed be
The source of all my glory and all my strength.

Toward that dark and slender torso,
Dazzled without erasure,
The space of desire;
Toward those solemn, vulnerable thighs
(If they ever build me an arch,
Let it be this one!);
Toward those lips ruined by the word,

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Saved by a kiss,
The space of desire:
Don Luis,
Once more
The poem dares to risk.

Their harangues and the charred fat of their laughter
Strike the enflamed marble—nothing burns them;
Their vulgarity is fireproof.
(Stupidity is also a phoenix; we didn't know that.)

But we advance toward the primary form
(". . . When the obvious sea
Under the irrefutable midday sun
Suspended my body
In the abdication of man before his god . . ."),
Always at the keenest point of mane and storm,
Toward the peril of the word. Annihilated, the image
Swirls and recomposes our universe. Breathable.
Our lungs become the Book. The breath of adolescents
writes.
Nevermore than in these pupils does our rebel face admit
Its realm and its confusion. Pupils, planet, my exile,
My flying saucer, my island, my transmutation.

It would be so easy . . . Once the wall is cleared, the glairs
Track us down and resume their viscous days,
The repressive sentence: families, religions, laws.
Once more they make the sun into a metal sea urchin
To scrape across our lips—until they draw urine.

Cursed be my language, wetnurse of discord.
Cursed be my country that kisses only to spew out its pus.
But not the poem—May it remain forever
On that naked adolescent, the sea!

Like the other in Medina
We flee, and yet each unmuddied step leads us back
To our people.
And cursed he who refuses his dream!
Yet from him arises—despite his whips—

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This truth that matches me with the world,
These fresh bodies, pure and beautiful.
From him these surges that are light and reconciliation;
From his sand the naked agave that I favor among all plants,
And the sign of calcination.
And yet for me he is neither fatherland nor poem.
Out of that rocky ground, the scorpion's refuge.

I will advance.
So different from you, so close,
Opaque older brother, mercury, dew on the thistle.
No mirror ever reflected more deeply
The Ring*
And the laurel's fierce ordeals.
But oh Cernuda, in these cracks, these pockets, that from stars to desertion . . .

—Tipasa, 25 September 1970.

*In French *"le Cerne."*

Talisman for Patrick

1.
The chariot of Afou is my cusp.
Everything is there, waiting to be understood.
Precious trashbins, baskets of storms.
My wound, you are the smile of moons and teeth.

2.
Another caress; the arabesques move.
Under my tongue your muscles compose springtime.
Caress. Tomorrow invents my past.
From memory to the place of glory
your hand bellows.

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3.
And they were dunes. Between our jaws,
tempests and bearings. They were
the paths of sabres, the cutting
fishbones of pain. And nude dancers,
divans on which to expire. And
phoenixes, in handfuls, too.

4.
Some dates, a spring, the heart,
like a palm tree in nubile hands,
is always a metronome of joy,
despite.

5.
We knew they would come:
mane of fire, loins of bronze,
hands of milk, the museum-piece eye dreaming,
the conquerors of this space between two nods.
We knew. Bled, we would not die.

6.
They came! say my future years.
Covered in jasmine, wings. Volcanoes
of honey, molten marble. Columns.
They came! Erections and voyages, feasts.
It was they who placed on our lips,
with the saliva and semen, the word
Reconciliation. Key to the World.

6a.
Throats of beasts were no longer cut,
nor men's. Rituals and pacts
were sealed in Essential Water.
In pleasure.
Flint for necklaces.

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7.
I love you; there were no more defeats.
For each day a tunic in exchange.
I remember my future.

—Algiers, 3 December 1971.

Ode to Black America

for Marc Baudon

Free Man smokes. He blows his smoke in my mouth. The tenements explode.
A black child laughs, his fine wooly hair smoothed by no mildew.
Planets. Planets.
We are not white-black. I am beautiful because I am black. I am beautiful because I am white. We are beautiful.

Blood is the color of Jericho roses, of dreams
Dreamed by the immigrant on his wretched straw mat
(Slave traders, bosses, you will pay!), the color
Of dawn on the beaches of Chenua and California—
Blood when it blossoms on the skin, not when it spurts under your cudgels
(You will pay!), the joy of Jericho roses.

Free Man speaks. Between his hands a fantastic geography rises.
Caresses.
The pig-siren sinks into bones. But
Free Man speaks. His lungs block the pollution of America.
Blacks and whites breathe. We try to breathe. We dare, we begin,
Call for air. Free Man speaks.

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Free Man gazes. Between his spear and his rifle. On this
rattan that is Africa, Free Man
Gazes. His thighs embrace us. Free Man gets
Hard. For freedom, for our
Daily bread. Free Man
Fixes his gaze on the black, the woman, the homosexual,
the drug-addict, the white, green, blue, Free Man
Fixes man's destiny in his iris,
Leads it to peaks of fire. Under the cobblestones
Lies the beach. Thank you, comrades! Free Man
Smokes. And Ho and Mao and Che and Palestine
And Crazy Horse
And November and May, the zodiac
Of self-determination and $E=mc^2$ the
Goodness of Einstein and Char and Fanon
And Artaud and
Angela who holds the thread of the Minotaur
And Genet on every chest and every mane of every
freedom
And Ginsberg and Voznesensky and Ted Joans and
Retamar and Opillen and Hikmet and Patrick MacAvoy
and Sonia Sanchez and Depestre and Blas de Otero and
Darwich and Khaïr-Eddine and Adonis and Cernuda
and Whitman and
The electric tom-tom the song the percussion the whole
Song of Reason and of the Poem and
Madness with its soft lips of buttered bread on the hearts
of Archie Shepp's children
In the coals between his three fingers
Bear witness and
Each of us in this witness
Recognizes his own dignity and his pleasure,
The horror of man fangs bared. Free Man,
Whom I name for everyone, who is named for everyone:
The kids, the crushed, the ragged, the militants, the whole
Anonymous mass.

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Free Man smokes. Into my mouth he tosses
His future. The shanty towns explode.
And the great green raft of America in tears shakes its
titanium monkeys.
Free Man smokes. His fist points to the wharf.
And the great raft of America in tears, drifting in the
Oriental night, fascinated, wild, rebels, falls to pieces.
Free Man
Sings. On his lyric thighs
The poem is no longer a sob.

—Algiers, 22 November 1970/22 February 1972.

translated from the French
by Mark Polizzotti

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The Leper

Tess Gallagher

When a place is too beautiful, there will be repercussions. Such places attract disruptions, encroachments, noxious pollutants of sound and deed. Things of the daily sort that would pass unnoticed in an ugly suburb, or even on some normal residential street, work a vengeance here. It is a burden, I'm saying, to live where I live.

Below the house is the beach. The bay is bright with water and light, and there is the wistful cry of gulls. But even now this is spoiled by the pounding of hammers against wood. It is my neighbor's porch steps being rebuilt. The pounding should stay attached to this. But in this place of relative tranquility my mind flings itself into gruesome possibilities—one moment there is the idea that a guillotine is being constructed, the next that a man-sized cross is being readied, or that someone is assembling a coffin board by board outside my window. But all the while, it is only the domestic carpentry of my neighbor's workmen.

Nonetheless, there is a privacy to be had here like no other. I can settle myself nicely into a sun-warmed chair and put my feet up on the railing and dream. But just then someone might come to knock at the door—the same neighbor who is building his steps, for instance, insisting, as he did once, that black ants have made a nest under the property and are threatening to carry away the entire hillside.

But not all disruptions to the beauty of this place are entirely unpleasant. Some fall into the range of what one might call "spectacle."

Our house overlooks other well-kept houses in this development which is situated outside a small seaport. One morning not long ago we looked down and saw a naked woman bicycling toward the tennis courts. It was raining. Not heavily, but enough so that those who would have been going for their

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morning walks had stayed inside. I put the binoculars on the woman and watched as she entered the fenced and forbidden tennis court of our neighbor. She pedaled round and round the court in wide, opulent circles.

"What does she think she's doing?" my husband said, drying his hands on his darkroom apron. He had already been at work printing the latest photographs he'd taken of the mountains of our area. "She's got to be nuts," he said and reached for the binoculars. "Give me a break!" he said, and shoved the binoculars back into my hands. I lifted them to my eyes again and saw that the woman had a message smeared on her back: COWARDS! it said in what I thought was lipstick.

"She probably knows everybody in this place just picked up their binoculars," I said, handing the glasses back to him.

"Not bad-looking," my husband said, pressing the lenses to his face. "But old Rosenthal won't like it a bit, her ruining the surface on his tennis court."

But no one came out of his house and no one interfered with the woman's methodical desecration of the tennis court. The rain kept falling. We ate our toast in the breakfast nook and went about our daily tasks. We had learned by now that it was best not to devote too much time to such occurrences.

Sometimes the assault on our tranquility persists and becomes an unwelcome, permanent part of our days, as when one of our neighbors, against all regulations, erected a bell tower into which he installed a carillon. At precisely noon and at six o'clock in the evening, it played notes approximating "Amazing Grace." There were complaints, of course. A vote was taken, as it is for any adjustment in our community. But unaccountably, there were more consenting households than not, so the carillon became a fixture in our days beside the beautiful light-shattered bay.

But when all seems *too* calm from without, my husband and I become uneasy. It is then that a rupture is most likely to come from within. Thus, with a certain false confidence, we noted that during the past several days of hammering, nothing untoward had happened—no arguments had broken out between us, no malfunctioning of appliances, no lost items that needed

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searching for. The snarl of saws, the thudding of hammer blows, seemed to have absolved our days of a beauty too open to decay or of the wearied bliss of resort havens, which our area most resembles.

But today, just as we began to settle into the relative comfort of this routine, the phone rang. It was my friend Jerome, a sculptor. He is a man who treads an uneasy path between fear and despair, and someone who could ill afford to be calling me at two o'clock in the afternoon on a weekday when telephone rates are at their peak.

"Jerome," I said, "this is costing an arm and a leg."

"I know. I can't help it," he said grimly. "I'm furious and I can't stop myself. Catlin was supposed to call me two hours ago. I'm about to be evicted. I've got to get payment on those pieces he sold. Why didn't he call when he said he would? Why does he torture me like this?"

Catlin is the gallery manager who handles Jerome's work. He is a conscientious fellow but recently had taken a lover and fallen into domestic problems.

"I'm sure there's a reasonable explanation for why he hasn't called," I said, trying to wipe flour off my hands. I'd begun to roll out pie dough when the phone had rung. I cradled the receiver on my shoulder and continued to shape the oval of dough into a circle with the rolling pin as I listened. Jerome was always working himself into a frenzy over things normal people would have shrugged off. But Jerome would take nothing for granted. There was no such thing as an unwilled act. If someone failed to answer his call or letter, it could mean one thing and one thing only—malicious, intentional neglect. He was forever bludgeoning himself with imagined betrayals—so much so that his anguished phone calls brought ridicule from our mutual friends, including one who even bragged that he kept crossword puzzles near the phone to amuse himself during calls from Jerome. My husband was similarly unsympathetic to Jerome's panics and turmoils.

"Tell him everyone hates him. Who'd want to call him anyway?" my husband shouted, then slammed the door to his darkroom. As I say, we live in a beautiful place and this puts an unnecessary strain on our lives.

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"Jerome," I said. "Something must have come up. Catlin's a fair man. He means only the best. Remember he's just been through a hard time and it still isn't easy. Maybe he isn't attending to business as well as he should."

"You can say that again!" Jerome said. "It's no excuse. I'm tired of their breakups, their influenzas and visiting in-laws. They won't get away with it!" I thought I heard him bang his fist down on something. But just then there was an awful rash of pounding close by that I mistakenly took for the sounds of the carpenters. I placed my free hand over my ear and pressed the receiver against my head with the other. Jerome's plaintive voice continued to enter my head despite the noise.

"Why? Why should I waste my forgiveness on such people?" he was saying.

"Jerome, dear, why don't you hang up and write me a letter. This is costing a fortune," I said. Yet the moment I suggested it, a fear rose up in me that this might lead to disaster. Jerome had once tried to gas himself but had been discovered by his landlady. Another time he'd thrown himself in front of a passing car. Luckily the driver had slammed on the brakes in time. Jerome had actually been committed to an institution for the mentally disturbed for a brief period during our college days—a time during which he got hold of a packet of matches and inflicted burn wounds on fifteen percent of his body. He joked about these scars now as "outbreaks of insanity." I was terrified of his silence, yet this too was an expected ritual of these conversations. As I listened for his reply, my front door opened.

A man in a green delivery uniform walked cautiously into my living room and placed a large pot of lilies on the dining-room table. Then he gave a respectful nod and backed out of the room, easing the door shut behind him.

I stared at the lilies as Jerome spoke and tried to work my way over to them so I could read the little white card that was attached. But the phone cord was too short.

"I can't hang up," Jerome said. "Someone's got to witness this cruelty. I'm sorry it has to be you. But I don't have that many friends left."

I caught a glimpse of myself in the hallway mirror as I moved back toward the kitchen. There were daubs of flour on my neck

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and chin. My left ear was white and there were pale blotches on my arms as well. God, I thought, I look like a leper. I remembered photographs of lepers in a *National Geographic* I'd seen as a child. The lepers looked doomed—participants in a ritual which left them no choice but to stumble from one rude hut to the next in search of shelter and companionship. As children we'd even played a game called Lepers. It was a game where one person was the leper and tried to touch the others who ran away. The article had described how the lepers had to eat apart from the healthy members of the tribe. They were often removed to remote areas where they were photographed with their bony arms extended—whether to display their ulcerated skin or toward some longed-for embrace, I never understood.

"Are you going to hang up on me?" Jerome asked. "What do you know about having to borrow money and to beg for the things you need? Go ahead, hang up. Live there in comfort and peace and forget about your friend."

"Jerome, I always listen. I do what I can," I said. I was used to these attempts to get me to abandon him. When that failed he would try to make me feel guilty because my fortunate circumstances separated me from the uncertainty he suffered daily. "Try to be a little more normal, Jerome," I pleaded. "Try to understand that the world is a busy place, that the world—" But before I could finish he was shouting into my ear.

"I'm not normal! This is Jerome and I'm not normal. I'll never be normal!" he cried.

I held the receiver away from my ear and felt the scald of his words ripple over me. He was right, and no amount of pacifying and reassuring could cover up that truth—indeed the very truth I loved him for.

"Hurry up! Get off the phone, will you?" my husband called from inside the darkroom. Sometimes when I was talking to Jerome he would come out and turn the radio on full blast. This time he contented himself with turning on the faucets and rattling things in his sink.

As I worked out the pie dough and listened to Jerome's distraught voice, I remembered the Jerome I'd met fifteen years ago, the Jerome who'd taken me to a deserted warehouse one

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night to show me his latest creation. He'd flicked a switch that ignited a row of light bulbs suspended down the center of the high-ceilinged space. There, miraculously floating in mid-air, dozens of feathers clung as if to the air itself. On closer inspection I saw that the feathers were attached to nylon fishing line strung from the ceiling. At the center of each feather-cluster was a metal nub.

"Magnets," Jerome said proudly. "Watch this." Then he switched on a fan and all the feathers began to blow in exactly the same direction, holding their course as if by some strong unseen force that synchronized their motions.

"They're set to Magnetic North," Jerome explained. He moved the fan around in the room but the feathers inevitably stabilized toward the same direction—Magnetic North. I understood then that Jerome, like these feathers holding formation in an otherwise empty warehouse, took his marching orders from somewhere as far off and crucially situated as Magnetic North itself. Yet only after I'd gone to the dictionary and looked up these words did I perceive their full import as regards my friend—that Magnetic North was in fact nearly impossible to locate if another magnetic field were to come into proximity of the compass needle. So it was for Jerome—a man easily pulled off course, sent twirling and plummeting earthward at the smallest gust of wind.

"Stop arguing against yourself and listen," I said sternly into the receiver. "Suppose Catlin *is* mistreating you. Suppose he wants you hanging there by your thumbs as you suspect, sick at heart, humiliated, waiting for him to call you."

"Okay," Jerome said in a small voice, satisfied that at last I was going to hear him out.

"Supposing," I said. "Supposing all that's true. What should I *do*?"

Jerome seemed to consider a moment as if *doing* were the last thing on his mind. "Just tell me Catlin doesn't mean it," he said at last. "Tell me he's had an emergency. His dog died. His teeth fell out. Anything. But don't let me believe he's treating me this way on purpose."

Someone began to pound on the door again. My husband

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cursed and thumped about in the small space of the darkroom, but did not venture out. I was afraid, for Jerome's sake, to put the phone down to go see what was happening. Then the door opened and two men in coveralls entered the living room. One was carrying a small pine tree and the other had a spray of gladioli and a pot of lavender mums. A white satin ribbon hung down from the mums across the man's arm. BELOVED MOTHER it read in gold lettering. The men placed the flowers and the tree near the lilies and turned to leave, but at the front door one of the men paused, then gave a quick tug at the bill on his cap. They didn't even have a chance to close the door when a heavyset woman moved tentatively into the living room. She saw that I was on the telephone and placed an index finger over her lips as she tip-toed into the kitchen. She was carrying a covered casserole dish.

"You must be Treena's daughter," she said and gave me a little peck on the cheek. She set the dish on the counter, patted me on the shoulder and then broke into muffled sobs. "I can't stay. Harold's in the car. God bless you," the woman said, wiping her eyes on her sleeve. Then she retraced her steps toward the door.

"There must be some mistake," I said.

"I'm tired of mistakes," Jerome said. "Nobody takes life seriously anymore. Look at all the injury it does. Excuse-me-excuse-me! It's a litany from morning till night."

"I'm in the middle of somebody's funeral," I said aloud.

"Don't toy with me," Jerome said. "Don't mock me."

"I'm not mocking you. I'm your friend. I don't know why I am, but I am," I said.

"Some friend!" came my husband's muffled voice from the darkroom.

The sweet odor of flowers had begun to fill the living room. Now it drifted into the kitchen where I was about to move the pie crust into the pan. I maneuvered the dough with both hands, holding the telephone receiver to my shoulder with my ear. Jerome wasn't talking, but I knew he was still there. I felt him there. As I looked up from the pie, I saw that a light fog was beginning to drift in from the bay along the shore. The

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pounding next door had stopped altogether now, but the memory of it was there like an undercurrent as I gazed out toward the bay.

"Jerome?" I said. But he didn't answer. "Jerome?" I repeated. I held the receiver and listened. As I waited I rested my gaze on the shoreline. The fog was lifting. Then, through the light-filled haze I saw horses, a small band of them. They were riderless, yet intent, as if someone or something were guiding them, urging them forward. The lead horse plunged without hesitation into the surf and began to swim toward a small island a few miles away. The other horses followed and I could only press the receiver against my neck in amazement and watch. There on a beach where neither dog nor child ran free, a band of horses had clattered over stones, over sand and into the waves. I put the receiver down on the counter and moved into the dining room to where the binoculars lay on the table near the lilies. I raised the glasses to my eyes. Striving above the waves I saw the heads of the horses. I could not take my eyes from them.

"What's this? What's going on here?" my husband demanded. "Is this some kind of bad joke?" he asked. I knew he was talking about the flowers. He went into the kitchen, and I heard him lift the lid on the casserole.

Through a break in the fog I could still see the horses. For a moment I imagined I could feel the steady pull of their legs in the current. Waves broke across my chest. I could see land in the distance like a thin silver streamer on the water.

I heard a click as my husband dropped the receiver into its cradle. Jerome, I thought with a leap of regret. But then I stood and listened as if our hold on each other had nothing to do with telephones, as if his silence still questioned me, implored me to hold a course for him in the tumult and battering of the waves. My husband opened a drawer and I heard the clink of silverware.

"At least that damned pounding has stopped," he said. "It was driving me nuts. What a day!"

I held my gaze on the horses. I felt possessed of a surety, a strength that surprised me. Even my long hair seemed infused with an energy of its own as it flowed down my back. I was sure

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that if I were to take a boat to the island tomorrow I would find hoofprints along the beach. They would have arrived, obedient to whatever instinct or necessity had drawn them there. And my friend Jerome, he too had an uncanny fidelity for destinations of which I was often the baffled lodestar.

I lowered the binoculars and turned toward my husband. He was at the table helping himself to the casserole. His spoon scraped against the sides of the dish. The overpowering sweet scent of the flowers made an invisible current in the room, and although they seemed to indicate a sadness for which I could do nothing, I leaned over and took in my breath from their fragrance.

My husband lifted food to his mouth. As I sat down at the far end of the table, he looked up in such a way that I remembered the flour on my brow and neck. But he said nothing and looked down at his plate again, as if thinking. Then he looked up and smiled with the fondness of one who endures much for the sake of a few moments' peace.

I saw that the fog had begun to move in around the house. We could be anywhere, I thought. Anywhere. But we were here. I held out my hand as he offered me my plate.

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Portfolio

Drawings

Philip Guston

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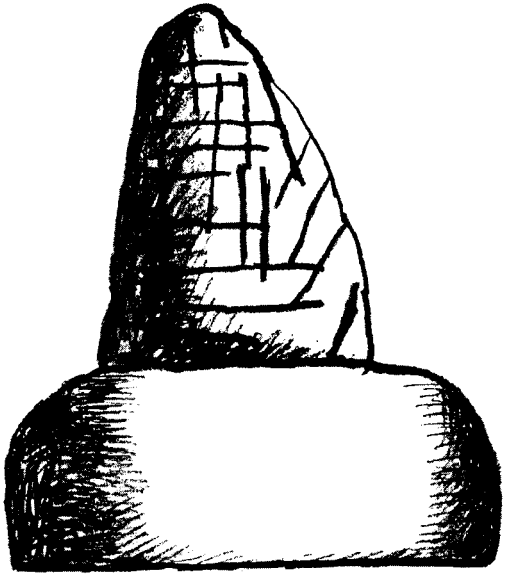
Ink Bottle and Quill, 1968



Wrapped, 1969

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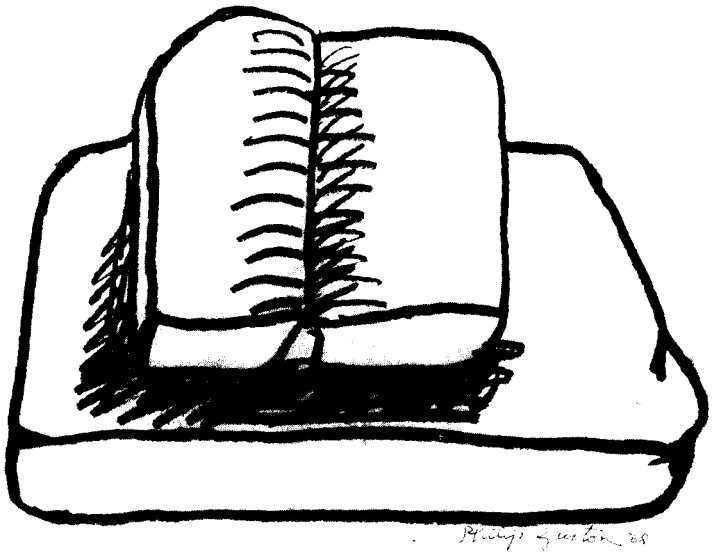
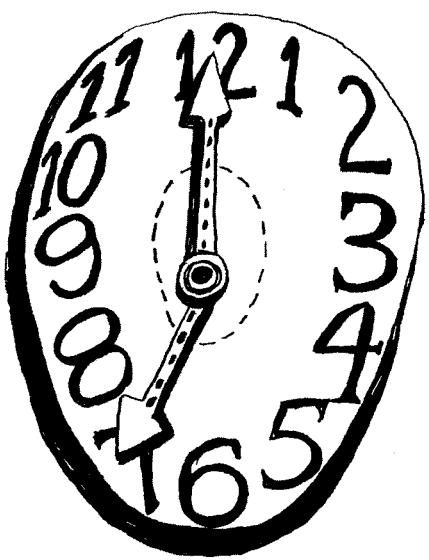


Book on Table, 1968



Clock, 1969

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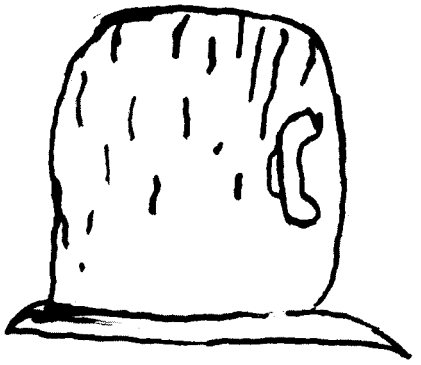

Sheriff, 1970

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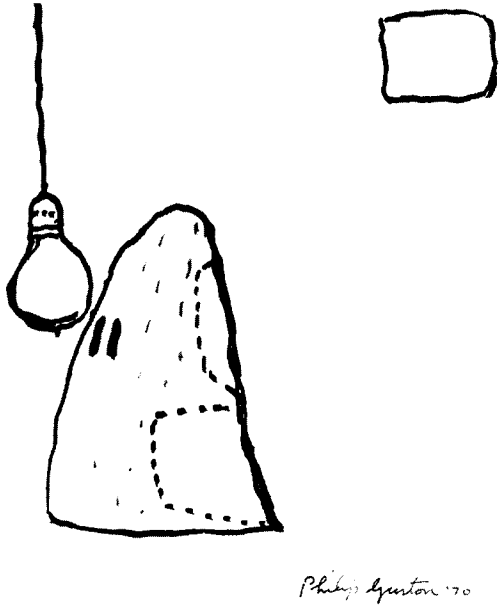

Solitary II, 1970

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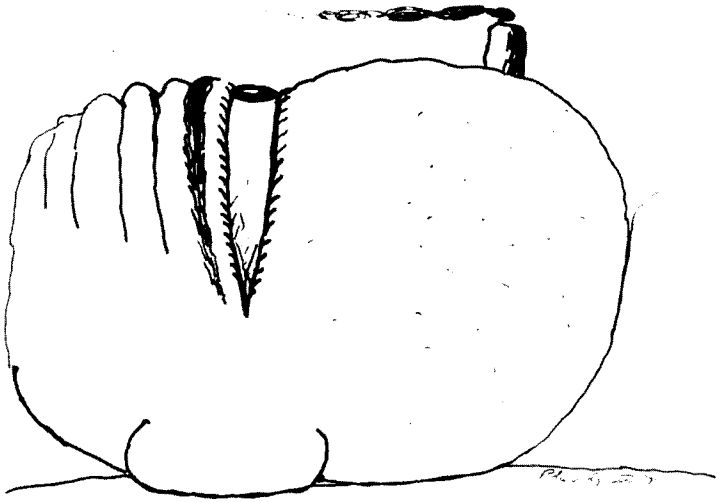
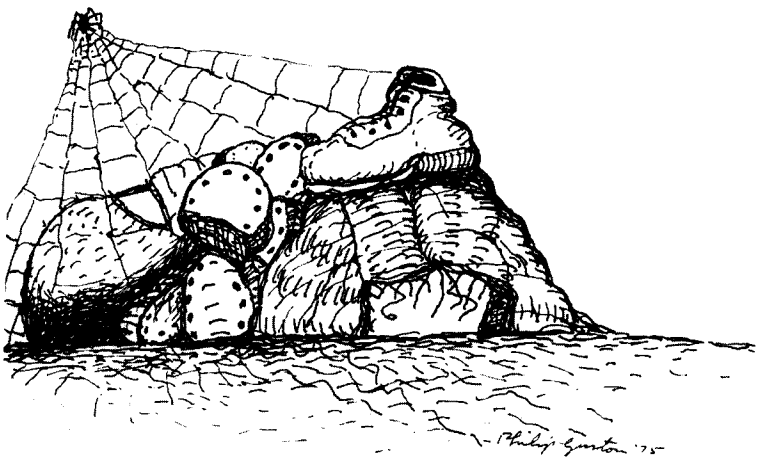


Head and Smoke, 1974



The Web, 1975

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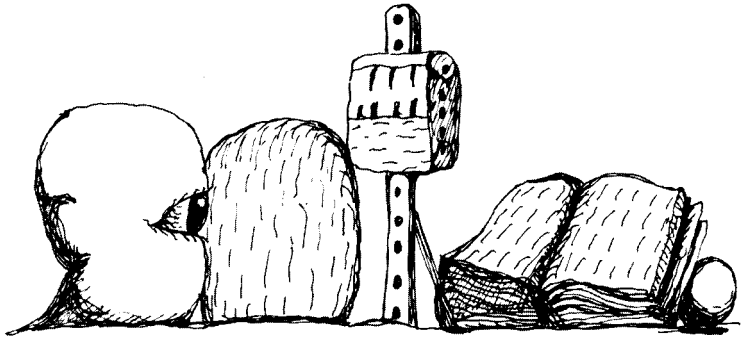
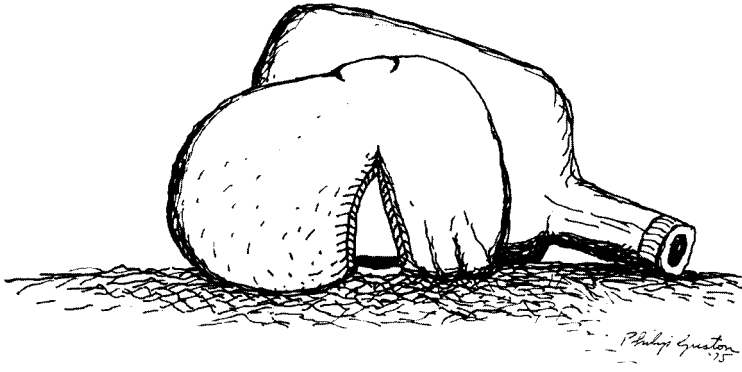


Heads, Easel, and Book, 1975



Head and Bottle, 1975

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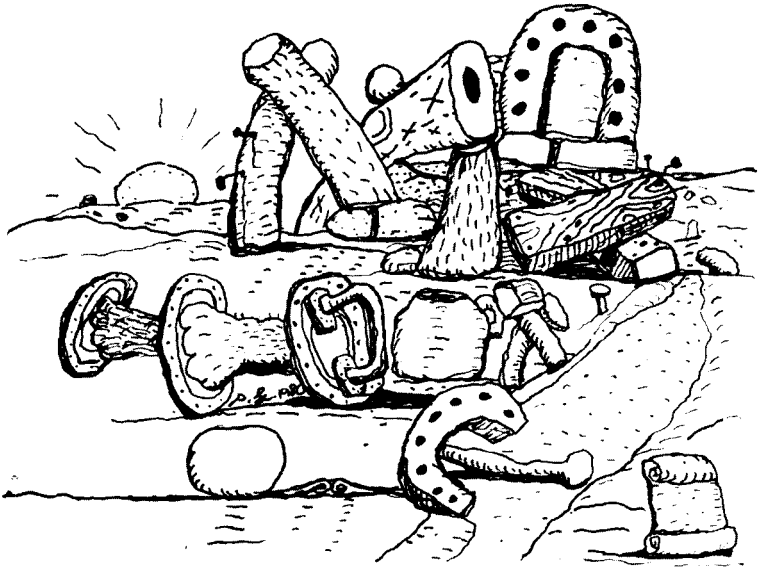

Untitled, 1980

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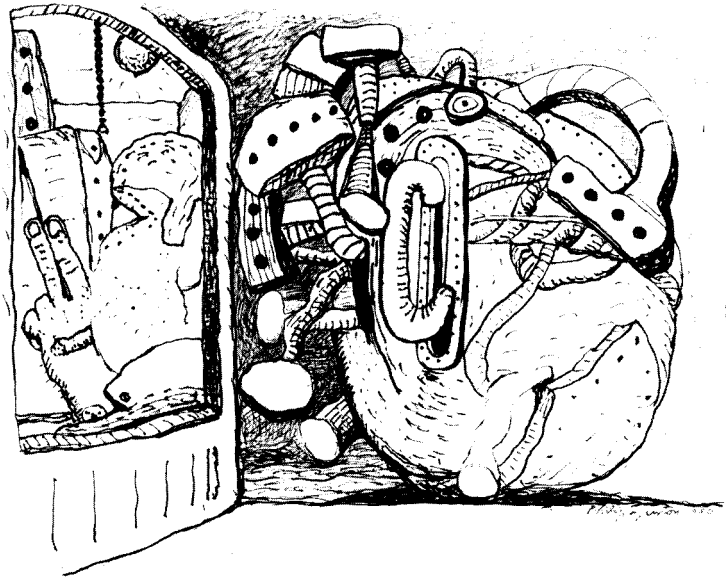

Self Portrait with Form, 1980

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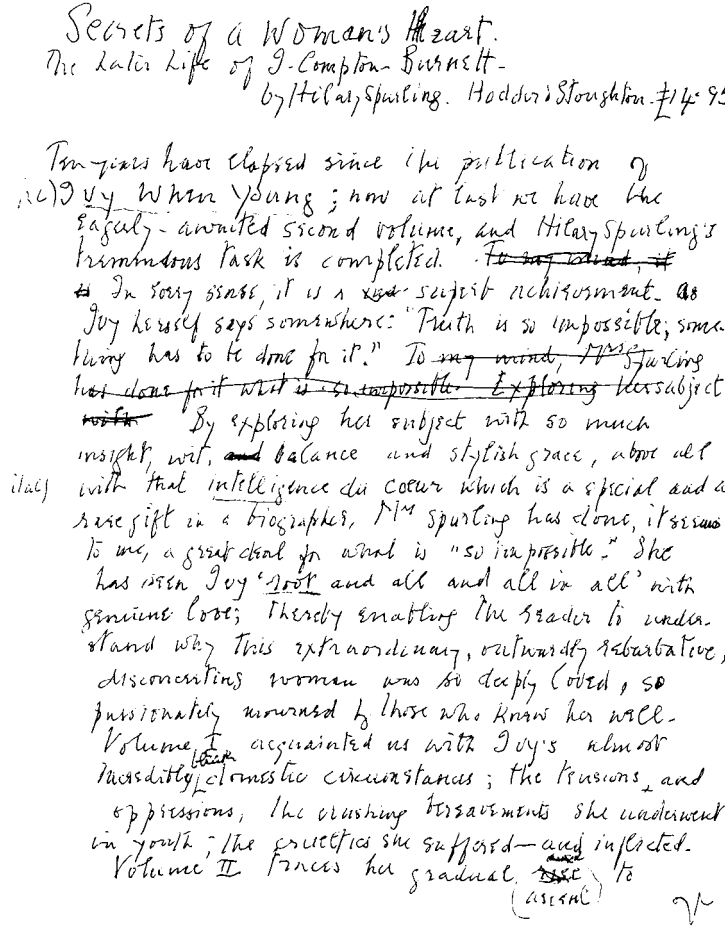
Secrets of a Woman's Heart.
The Later Life of I. Compton-Burnett -
by Hilary Spurling. Hodder & Stoughton £14.95

Twenty years have elapsed since the publication of Ivy Compton-Burnett; now at last we have the eagerly-awaited second volume, and Hilary Spurling's tremendous task is completed. ~~To my mind, it~~ In many senses, it is a great achievement. As Ivy herself says somewhere: "Truth is so impossible, something has to be done for it." ~~To my mind, Mrs~~ Spurling ~~has done for it what is impossible. Exploring~~ her subject ~~with~~ By exploring her subject with so much insight, wit, and balance and stylish grace, above all with that intelligence du coeur which is a special and a rare gift in a biographer, Mrs Spurling has done, it seems to me, a great deal for what is "so impossible." She has seen Ivy "poor and all and all in all" with genuine love; thereby enabling the reader to understand why this extraordinary, outwardly reticent, disconcerting woman was so deeply loved, so passionately mourned by those who knew her well.
Volume I acquainted us with Ivy's almost incredibly eventful domestic circumstances; the tensions and oppressions, the crushing bereavements she underwent in youth; the conflicts she suffered — and inflicted.
Volume II traces her gradual ~~rise~~ (ascent) to

A Lehmann manuscript page from her review of Secrets of a Woman's Heart *by Hilary Spurling.*

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Rosamond Lehmann, circa 1940.

The Art of Fiction LXXXVIII
Rosamond Lehmann

Rosamond Lehmann was born in 1901, in Bourne End, Buckinghamshire. Her father, Rudolph Lehmann, was the editor of Punch, *as well as a well-known oarsman and fencer. He became a Liberal M.P. in 1906. Her mother, Alice Davis, was from Boston, Massachusetts. Rosamond was the second of their four children. One of her sisters, the late Beatrix Lehmann, became an actress. Her brother, John Lehmann, is a writer, editor, and publisher. The Lehmann family lived in grand Edwardian style in a large house on the river Thames,*

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and the children were brought up by a staff of nannies, governesses, and tutors, only "coming down after tea" to see their parents.

In 1919, Lehmann went as a scholar to Girton College, Cambridge, and obtained an honors degree in English. In 1924, she met and married Leslie Runciman, now Lord Runciman. The marriage was not a success, and they parted three years later. Meanwhile, Lehmann had written her first novel, Dusty Answer, *an account of a young girl's first encounter with love. After an initial mixed reception, the novel became a bestseller.*

In 1928, Lehmann married Wogan Philipps, now Lord Milford, a Communist peer, and had a son and a daughter. Her second novel, A Note in Music, *about two women locked in hopeless marriages in a northern town, was less warmly received. Undaunted, Lehmann went on to write* Invitation to the Waltz, *published in 1932, and* The Weather in the Streets *in 1936, both of which were instant bestsellers. In 1940, her private life was again shattered by the breakup of her second marriage.*

During World War II, Lehmann lived in the country with her two children and started a long and happy relationship with the poet Cecil Day Lewis. During this time, she contributed a series of highly popular short stories to her brother's magazine, New Writing. *The stories were collected in* The Gypsy's Baby *in 1946. Her next novel was* The Ballad and the Source *in 1945, which was also successful. Her relationship with Day Lewis ended in 1949, and in 1953 she wrote what is perhaps her most successful novel,* The Echoing Grove. *In 1958, tragedy struck, with the death of her young daughter Sally, who had married the poet J. P. Cavanagh. Shattered by grief, Lehmann thought she could never write again. She became interested in spiritualism, and in 1967 wrote* The Swan in the Evening, *fragments of autobiography in which she describes her psychic experiences following the death of her daughter. In 1977, she wrote* A Sea-Grape Tree, *in which she introduces some of her new insights into psychic phenomena.*

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For years, Lehmann's novels were out of print, but now that both Penguin and Virago have republished them, she has found a large and appreciative new readership. Several of the novels have become bestsellers again, and The Weather in the Streets *recently was made into a film. Every day, she receives letters from women who tell her, "You have written my story."*

Lehmann lives alone in a small house in Kensington. Her great beauty—famous in youth and middle age—seems undiminished by age. Her ivory skin, silver-blond hair, and tall handsome figure still exude dignified glamor. Now in her eighties, Lehmann is hardly idle. Her diary is full with lunch and dinner dates, and a young BBC producer is currently at work on a documentary of her life and work. Lehmann is also vice-president of the College of Psychic Studies in London and edits their magazine, Light*; in addition, she is active in PEN International. Lehmann wears pastel-colored clothes enlivened by touches of colored accessories. She speaks in a soft, firm voice and often uses terms of endearment. The following interview took place in her small sitting room, in front of a log fire and a tray of tea.*

INTERVIEWER

When did you become aware of your vocation as a writer? Indeed, was it a vocation?

ROSAMOND LEHMANN

It was what you might call a vocation, insofar as I can't remember when I didn't have the sense that I was destined to write. The first time I actually wrote something was at the age of five or six. I was sitting in a walnut tree, eating toffee, and there was a scribbling block on my knees. Suddenly, I started to write a poem. It had three or four stanzas.

INTERVIEWER

Do you remember any of it?

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LEHMANN

Yes I do:

Out in the shady woodland glade,
Where the wind blows soft and sweet,
Where the leaves tell stories of sun and shade,
And the acorn drops at your feet,

I sigh as I wander amid the trees
And my sigh comes back on the wings of the breeze

. . . and so on. Well, I couldn't write it all down, so I rushed to my father and said, "Daddy, what is this?" He looked at it and said, "It is a poem. Where did you get it from?" I said, "I made it up. *Is* it a poem?" and he said, "Yes, well done!" Suddenly I had a sense of identity. As you see, it was a sort of doggerel, but from that moment on I never stopped writing.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write only poems?

LEHMANN

Poetry and so-called poetry. Oh, it was so easy then! Everything flowed. I wrote all about fairies, and moonbeams, and nature, and it all poured out in rhymes. I destroyed most of the poems when I was fourteen, because I was ashamed of them, but I have kept a few. I think they might amuse my grandchildren.

INTERVIEWER

Did your parents encourage you?

LEHMANN

My mother was from New England. She was very puritanical and upright, and she didn't want us to be conceited. I remember —oh so vividly!—her saying to a guest, "Rosie writes doggerel," which pierced me to the heart. But my father was very encouraging, as he was a writer himself and came from a highly literary and artistic family.

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INTERVIEWER

What was your father's family like?

LEHMANN

The Lehmanns must have been Jewish in origin. My grandfather, Frederick Lehmann, came from Hamburg and married Nina Chambers, daughter of Robert Chambers, founder of *Chambers' Journal* and *Chambers' Encyclopaedia*. Robert was a famous literary figure in his day. One of his many works was a heretical book on evolution—*before* Darwin's—called *Vestiges of Creation*. It caused a great stir in orthodox Christian circles and he published it anonymously. Later, when he was asked why, he answered, "I have eleven good reasons." He had eleven children, you see, and he feared their chances in society would have been grievously affected. My grandparents, Frederick and Nina, had a literary and musical salon in mid-Victorian times. Nina was a brilliant pianist and had played with Clara Schumann and Joachim. Writers such as Robert Browning, Charles Dickens, and Wilkie Collins were their close friends. My great-uncle was the painter Henri Lehmann, who did that famous portrait of Liszt. His brother Rudolf painted most of the Victorian celebrities of the day. The two brothers' portraits hung in my father's library. I used to sit there and think of them as my ancestors; I feared I could never be worthy of my heritage. My father was a fine classical scholar as well as an athlete—an oarsman and a fencer. He was very beautiful and all my life I was in love with him. As a result, I have always been fatally attracted to good-looking men who resemble him. I know nothing of his love life, except that he remained a bachelor until he was over forty. Then, on a trip to America to coach the Harvard crew, he met my mother, a twenty-four-year-old New England girl, a graduate of Radcliffe, and they fell in love. A year later he married her and they came to live in England.

INTERVIEWER

In *Invitation To The Waltz* you describe a wealthy Edwardian household. Was it based on your own home?

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LEHMANN

I suppose it was. My father was very well off, but he lost half his capital by entrusting it to a friend who speculated with it on the stock market. The poor man shot himself; we became much less rich. We didn't have to leave our home, but it meant the departure of our hated Belgian governess, the loss of our horses and stables, and a much smaller staff. Then came the First World War, and my father began to develop Parkinson's disease. My mother, who was a kind of Henry James heroine—in that she had a formidable sense of duty—took it upon herself to nurse him. Gradually he became a hopeless invalid and eventually died in 1929.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of schooling did you have in those early years before the First World War?

LEHMANN

My parents didn't approve of girls' schools, and we were educated at home. My enterprising mother had a pavilion built at the end of the garden to house a kind of kindergarten for us and several little neighbors. Later we learned excellent French from our governess, music from a lady in the village, and a charming young woman came from London once a week to teach us drawing. I had the run of my father's library. I was allowed to read anything, and did. I suppose such an education would be considered hopelessly inadequate today, but the thought of being sent away to boarding school was a nightmare to me.

INTERVIEWER

What kind of books did you read in those early years, and which ones, do you think, later influenced your writing?

LEHMANN

I read a great deal of poetry. Browning was my favorite. I also read Matthew Arnold, Keats, Shelley, Byron. . . . I didn't warm to Byron then, but later, when I read his letters and his biography, I was fascinated by his personality. I also read the

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great Victorian novelists: Dickens, Thackeray, the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Jane Austen . . . Dickens was my passion. On the whole I was very well read in Victorian literature. Amazingly enough, I can't say that any of them influenced my writing, except perhaps the poets. I read *Little Women*, by Louisa May Alcott, a dozen times at least, and all E. Nesbit's wonderful books as they came out. Later, when I went to Cambridge, I read English, which meant all the greats. But I learned more from reading on my own and discussing books with my father than I ever did at Cambridge.

INTERVIEWER

What about American literature? Did your mother introduce you to American writers?

LEHMANN

She didn't introduce me to American authors, except Edith Wharton, for whom she had a great reverence. She was more interested in history than novels. I read Henry James, and still do. He and Wharton are both giants, but at times I almost prefer Wharton—she doesn't have the *longueurs* or the convolution of Henry James. I have just reread her novel *The Reef*, and I am amazed at her deep understanding of the heart, of the relationships between men and women. Wharton didn't have a happy marriage, did she? Bernard Berenson told me that she had a great love affair with Walter Barry, a well-known worldly figure in his day, whom she adored till the end.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write at Cambridge?

LEHMANN

The flow became less and less and finally stopped. I mean poetry. Cambridge was a sort of explosion out of the cocoon. My father's family disapproved of my going to university, saying, "Poor girl! She is pretty, yet they send her away to become a bluestocking!" But my mother believed that girls should have the same education as boys. I was overjoyed! I thought I would

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be among the *fines-fleurs* of the intelligentsia. But it wasn't so in my day. Most of my contemporaries came from a different background and were preparing to be teachers. That was a strange time. Most young men had been killed in the War and our circle was decimated. Those at Cambridge were the survivors, and they were older and more sophisticated than undergraduates usually are. The food and the cold were simply awful, and there was very strict *chaperonnage*. We were not allowed to visit young men in their rooms or ask them to a tête-à-tête tea in ours. A certain amount of climbing over the walls and dropping *billet-doux* took place; poems and letters were dropped for me, but we were not allowed to mix in any normal way. How different it is today! My granddaughter is having a happy relationship with a young man at Oxford who lives on the same hallway! I wonder if they get any work done. Apparently they do, because the standards are so high and the competition is so fierce.

INTERVIEWER

Did it worry you that you had stopped writing?

LEHMANN

Not really. I wrote a few articles for *Granta*, which my father had started, and my essays were praised. It was generally assumed that I would be a writer. My ambition was twofold: to get married and have children, and to be a writer. After falling desperately and unrequitedly in love with a young man at Cambridge, I met Leslie Runciman in London and married him. We went to live in Newcastle, where he worked in his family's shipping business. I soon realized that I had made a terrible mistake, that the marriage was doomed. For one thing, he didn't want any children and I longed for them. I thought, "What have I done? What will become of my life?" Then Wogan Philipps came to work in my husband's firm and after a while I realized that I was going to fall in love with him. Instead of feeling hopelessly trapped, I suddenly saw a light, some hope. I dropped the rather boring novel I had started and began to write *Dusty Answer*. I went away to Dorset, rented a room in

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a farm house, and wrote and wrote for two or three months, until I finished it. Then I went back to Newcastle. I lived in a sort of trance and identified with Judith, the heroine, who is a lonely, romantic girl living in a dream. Now I find Judith far too sappy and overly romanticized. I can't bear her.

INTERVIEWER

At the time everybody assumed that *Dusty Answer* was autobiographical and that you would not follow it up with anything of the same quality. How autobiographical is it? Did you invent the two houses by the river, the children, and the mysterious grandmother?

LEHMANN

People always assume that because my novels have real locations that my characters are true portraits. They are not. They were invented, but of course they were based on fragments of children I had known. I invented entirely the grandmother, and I put them all in the house next door to ours in Bourne End.

INTERVIEWER

The book has an atmosphere of poetic enchantment, a dream quality, which reminded me of Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes.*

LEHMANN

Funny you should say that about *Le Grand Meaulnes*, because that is what people said at the time in France. Perhaps it explains the book's tremendous success with the French, who still read it, even though they probably think I have been dead for decades!

INTERVIEWER

Back in Newcastle, what did you do with your manuscript?

LEHMANN

We had taken a house in Northumberland for the summer and friends came to stay for weekends. Among them was George

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Rylands, who had been the star of his generation at Cambridge, both as a scholar and an actor. I told him that I had written a novel and asked if he would mind looking at it. Rather reluctantly, I think—judging by how I feel when my friends ask me to do the same thing—he took it away to read. He must have been impressed, since he sent it to Harold Raymond, one of the directors of Chatto & Windus. Three weeks later I got a letter from Raymond saying that they would like to publish the book, though they did not expect to make any money out of it. I received a modest contract—very modest—but I was overjoyed. By the time the book was published, I was separated from my husband and living in a cottage with my sister Beatrix. The first reviews of *Dusty Answer* were rather censorious. They said it was full of sex and that there was an intimation of lesbianism—you remember the two girls? My mother was loyal but upset. She wrote me some "never-mind-darling" letters, but I knew she was hurt. Then Alfred Noyes, who was a well-known poet and had been a protégé of my father's, wrote a long article in *The Sunday Times* in praise of the book, saying that it was the kind of novel Keats might have written if he were alive today.

INTERVIEWER

Your second novel, *A Note In Music*, seems to be based on your unhappy life in Newcastle: two women trapped in hopeless marriages in a cold, northern provincial town. Yet you wrote it when you were happily remarried to Wogan Philipps. Did you need the distance from your first marriage to recount the experience in fictional terms?

LEHMANN

A writer works from the material she has, but it comes from the unconscious. Everything is stored up and one never knows what comes up to the surface at a given moment. A period of gestation is certainly needed, what Wordsworth called "emotion recollected in tranquility." You cannot write about an experience when you are living it, suffering it. You are too busy surviving to look at it objectively. At least *I* can't.

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INTERVIEWER

In *A Note In Music*, the heroine, Grace Fairfax, never gets out of her marriage. Did you deliberately avoid the happy ending—which actually happened to you—because in those days most women never did escape their miserable marriages?

LEHMANN

I never do anything deliberately. It wasn't *my* story, it was the story of two women who didn't get out. I am amazed at writers who say that they know exactly what is going to happen and what a character is going to do. Perhaps that is the difference between a creative, imaginative writer and a reporter or journalist; once a character has been created it leads you rather than is led by you, although, I suppose, at the same time you have to control it. But the novel follows its own organic course.

INTERVIEWER

The reviews of your second book were less enthusiastic, though some writers liked it—E.M. Forster, for instance.

LEHMANN

Perhaps that was partly because of the homosexual element. Homosexuality was never written about in novels in those days. E.M. Forster wrote *Maurice* but never dared publish it—until many years later. Yet it was the beginning of the great homosexual wave; it was considered clever and sophisticated and "being Greek." At Cambridge and Oxford, it seemed everyone either was a homosexual or was pretending to be. I remember my first husband wrote to a Cambridge friend of his when we got married, "You might think it degrading of me to settle for a woman, but she is different—she has the mind of a *man*." *Me*!

INTERVIEWER

While you were married to Wogan Philipps, you wrote *Invitation to the Waltz* and *The Weather in the Streets*. Olivia is the heroine of both books. In the first she is a child and an adolescent; in the second she is a young woman who has been married and is now divorced. It seems that once you had created

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Olivia as a child and an adolescent, she refused to go until you told the rest of her story as an adult.

LEHMANN

I think Olivia is a much more autobiographical figure than Judith in *Dusty Answer.* As I said, I don't like Judith now. Olivia is much more real, less romanticized. She is about sixteen in *Invitation to the Waltz* when she meets Rollo fleetingly at the ball. I thought Olivia would see Rollo years later and fall in love with him. Some people were scandalized by the back-street abortion scene in *The Weather in the Streets*, yet abortions happened all the time. I had friends who had been through it with my support, but no one ever *talked* about it. To me, it seemed unthinkable *not* to write the scene since it was part of the truth of the story. Novelists worth their salt tell the truth as they see it. My American publishers wanted me to remove the abortion scene, but I refused.

INTERVIEWER

You were living in the country at the time, near Oxford. As a famous, bestselling writer, did you meet and make friends with other literary figures?

LEHMANN

I did make a great many friends. Lytton Strachey and his wife Carrington lived within motoring distance and came over frequently. Others came and stayed for weekends—Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, George Rylands, Virginia and Leonard Woolf, Raymond Mortimer, and others from the Bloomsbury circle. I was rather shy and thought them all cleverer than I. We didn't talk much about our books but about writing and art in general, and there was a lot of laughter and gossip. As time went on we talked about what was inevitably to come—the war. They were all passionate anti-Fascists. My husband became more and more left-wing and eventually joined the International Brigade and went to Spain to drive an ambulance.

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Bloomsbury was the core of the literary world, but I never thought I belonged to them. In fact I never belong to any group. I was completely engrossed with my children and my own writing. It was a bold and tragic gesture to go and fight in the Spanish Civil War, the last time that young Englishmen like Julian Bell and John Cornford (both of whom were killed) were ready to fight idealistically for what they believed to be human rights. Most, like George Orwell and Stephen Spender, were disillusioned, but Wogan held on. He had a Pauline conversion to communism and is still a believer, despite the Gulags and everything else that has come to light, much as a Christian holds on to his faith despite the bloody history of Christianity, or a Moslem *malgré* Khomeini. Anyway, at the time I was involved with them all—they were our friends. I read all of Virginia Woolf's books and thought them simply wonderful. Now I can't read them; I find her essays and journals infinitely better than her novels. Her heroines are not real women to me. She was an ardent feminist and argued the feminist case brilliantly in *Three Guineas* and *A Room of One's Own*. Both were clarion calls for women's equality. I never wrote anything like that, but then I wasn't that kind of writer. Woolf influenced people considerably, and for me that side of her work is far more important than her novels. Her journals remain her great masterpieces. I now find the Bloomsbury ethic a little parochial and introspective. They did not deal with universal aspects of things, and they always seem to be playing with meaning—"What is Truth?" "What is Love?"—forever *flirting* with truth. What they did and wrote about painting is their great contribution—people like Roger Fry and Clive Bell, who introduced the French impressionists to England. I made some lasting friendships. Elizabeth Bowen for instance, whose books I admire as much as ever. She said once that she was *envious* of my reputation, she was too great a person to be jealous. There were various complications in our lives which separated us for a while, but we became close later. I was with her a great deal during her last years. Ivy Compton-Burnett was another writer I admired. She was an extraordinary and unique woman, very witty and relaxing to

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be with. Her books wear well. I read one the other day and enjoyed it as much as I had in the fifties. Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh were others I read and admired.

INTERVIEWER

When your second marriage broke up in 1940, you moved into a cottage and wrote the short stories which were later collected in *The Gypsy's Baby*. What made you change genres, and what is the difference between a novel and a short story for you?

LEHMANN

The short story seems easier to me, perhaps because those particular ones were based on my childhood memories and I was creating from memory. My brother had started a literary magazine, *New Writing*, and asked me to contribute stories to it. Then one day I began what I thought would be a long short story and in walked Mrs. Jardine. As I wrote on, she kept growing and things began to happen around her and in her past, and the story became a novel, *The Ballad and the Source*. I think each work creates its own form and its own span and rhythm. Nowadays many novels seem to be padded short stories. But a good novel can't be conceived as a short story, because it couldn't be compressed into one.

INTERVIEWER

You once said that you were a privileged person with leisure and money, and could write without pressure. It corroborates Woolf's view in *A Room of One's Own* that women need five thousand a year and a private place to write. Do you still agree with that?

LEHMANN

That is nonsense! I don't know any writer today who has that kind of private income. A room, yes, one needs tranquility. But most women writers today work very hard to earn a living. Anita Brookner has a very taxing job as an art historian. In my case, although I started with a privileged life, I certainly had to make

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a living out of my writing after my separation from my second husband. I think the need to make a living can be a spur—it was in my case. I was lucky that by then I was well-known, since I can't write a book a year. I remember J.B. Priestley telling me, "You are good, but you are an amateur." He knew how professional and serious I was with my writing, and what he meant was that I didn't produce enough.

INTERVIEWER

Do you regret not having produced more books?

LEHMANN

Not really. There were always so many other things I enjoyed—children, music, reading, friendship. I never thought my writing was the most important thing in my life and that I should withdraw from everything and everyone else in order to produce a book a year. Anyway, one waits for the creative flow to start. One cannot force it, and shouldn't. This is what I would like to make clear: that a creative novelist—or dramatist for that matter—*always* relates back to what he or she has stored up from the first two or three decades of life. Childhood and youth are the source. Certainly all that I have written—the voices, faces, places, and images—the whole creative thrust, comes from my early life. Of course, being older, I related all that to the present. I am not comparing myself to Dickens, but even he always went back to his childhood, or so we are told by his latest biographers. It doesn't matter how late you start. George Eliot began to write after forty but her material came from her childhood.

INTERVIEWER

The critic Sydney Janet-Kaplan said that the story of Mrs. Jardine and the dead daughter in *The Ballad and the Source* illustrated the myth of Demeter looking for her daughter Persephone. Do you agree?

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LEHMANN

Who knows? I didn't think of it at the time, but with hindsight I can see that the myth is there. A creative writer is in touch with something much deeper which comes from the unconscious. I don't mean the Freudian *subconscious*—a wastepaper basket of unfulfilled sexual desires—but the Jungian *unconscious*—something deeper, belonging to the human race, whence myths spring. This is why so many critics and journalists are so boring; they don't see the deeper layers of things.

INTERVIEWER

In your last novel before your daughter Sally's death, the *Echoing Grove*, the two sisters, Dinah and Madeleine, are in love with the same man, Madeleine's husband. Was it based on your own experience with Cecil Day Lewis, who was married?

LEHMANN

No. *Not at all.* Everyone seems to have assumed it was, and I was upset. My relationship with Lewis was very happy and its break-up was the biggest disaster of my life. I couldn't possibly have written about it. All my male characters are based on men I had known in my youth. Madeleine and Dinah are *not* aspects of myself, whatever the critics say. Dinah is much more like my sister Beatrix. As I said, she is not a portrait. Neither is Madeleine.

INTERVIEWER

So it is a case of *"Madame Bovary, c'est moi!"* and *"Madame Bovary, ce n'est pas moi!"*

LEHMANN

Exactly. The whole process in a nutshell.

INTERVIEWER

Your novels were almost forgotten for twenty years until Virago recently republished them and they became bestsellers again. It has been suggested that your novels depict an affluent upper-class milieu of Etonians and country houses which the Leftish

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sixties and seventies were not attuned to, and that now, with the revival of conservatism and the interest in our imperial past, they have become acceptable again. I am inclined to think that it has something to do with a distinct feminine sensibility which your work exemplifies. What do you think?

LEHMANN

I think that's true, and also accounts for Virago's huge success. Virago novels are not feminist, in that awful, aggressive way which denies women their feminine identity. They are concerned with the understanding of feminine sensibility. Radical feminism denies the difference between men and women. My novels explore it. I do believe that women have a much richer emotional nature than men, and are more intuitive. They are as strong and intelligent as men, but in a different way. They often take the initiative; Judith in *Dusty Answer* and Rebecca in *A Sea-Grape Tree* both declare their love before the man makes the move. That used to be something quite unacceptable. Even today, women are supposed to wait for men to show interest, though I'm told this is no longer *de rigueur!* Similarly, my women don't play games. But then neither did Dorothea Brooke, George Eliot's heroine in *Middlemarch*. I love Dorothea, don't you? But if you don't play games you run the risk of being rejected and hurt, as Judith does. In *The Ballad and the Source* Rebecca says, "One day men and women will be able to speak the truth with each other." I remember Woolf saying, "Don't forget that we won this for you," referring to the ability to discuss sex frankly with our male friends. Generalizations are dangerous, but it seems to me that women tend to have higher emotional expectations than men; they are not content with a smaller-scale love or experience. I am always amazed at how little love and emotion men can get along with quite nicely! Women suffer much more when they are deprived of love.

INTERVIEWER

Do you think it is somewhat different today, when women have careers and responsible jobs?

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LEHMANN

I suppose they are not so dependent now, but think of the anguish of being a rejected Victorian girl. It wasn't considered correct to leave rejection behind and try again, it was once and for all, and you remained a rejected or widowed or abandoned woman forever. Even after the First World War, many young women remained old maids because they had lost their fiancés in the war. You don't mourn a faithless lover as Trollope's Lily Dale did, who never raised her head again, you just go and find yourself another one. This is why some contemporary novels are apt to be dull, because the concept of guilt about moral lapses doesn't exist any more. How can you write an interesting novel when there are no secrets, and nothing is sacred?

INTERVIEWER

The suffragette movement was before your time, but I believe your mother was active in it. Did it influence you?

LEHMANN

As a Liberal M.P., my father was in favor of women having the right to vote. I don't think my mother would have stayed with him if he hadn't been, as she was an ardent suffragette. She wasn't militant. She deplored women tying themselves to railings and that kind of thing—she thought it was counterproductive to the cause. But she went to meetings and canvassed with my father in his constituency.

INTERVIEWER

What about the upsurge of feminism in the sixties and seventies, when many women writers became prominent by taking up the banner?

LEHMANN

I'm afraid I didn't like that. I thought it was too aggressive and unfruitful. Now I am told some feminists advocate lesbianism as a matter of principle. That is what I feared might happen, a total breach. How can the majority of women go along with that? Even the Greenham Common women. Though I agree with their cause, that nuclear weapons should be banned,

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I couldn't be one of them, because the *way* they go about it seems to dehumanize them. On the whole anything that becomes a cult, or a mass movement, loses its moral and spiritual value. The crusade has to be personal, individual. As soon as it becomes collective it loses its purpose.

INTERVIEWER

It becomes what Jung called "a collective infection."

LEHMANN

Absolutely. That is perhaps why my voice still may be "vibrant," because it is individual, whatever you may think of it. I think that the relationship between men and women is perhaps improving, that there is a dialogue, an understanding. Because men are beginning to realize that there is femininity in them and that there is a male ingredient in women which needs to be catered to. I think this is the greatest thing Jung bequeathed to us: that the *anima*, or female in men, and the *animus*, or male in women, have to be recognized and dealt with. Few get the balance right, alas, but if one does there can be harmony.

INTERVIEWER

Painful as it is to talk about Sally's death, it seems to have changed your life and your work completely.

LEHMANN

I described it as it happened in *The Swan in the Evening*. Yes, there was an omen: a blackbird hit against my window and dropped dead. It was like a hard thud in my heart, but I was quite happy at the time and brushed it aside, until the news arrived . . .

INTERVIEWER

I know you don't like the word "spiritualism" with its connotation of charlatanism, but Sally's death did seem to spark your interest in the spiritual life.

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LEHMANN

In the thirties, like most of my contemporaries, I was an agnostic. I was never a staunch atheist, but I thought that a spiritual life was a sort of gift that I didn't possess. I rejected all orthodox religions: they seemed narrow and dogmatically backward. I read with pleasure the great Christian mystics—Julian of Norwich, St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross . . . When Sally died I was completely shattered; I didn't think of committing suicide, but I knew I couldn't live without her. So what was I to do? Then out of this appalling darkness came an extraordinary breakthrough: I had the conviction of her presence. I didn't actually see her, but I heard her voice with my inner ear, and I could touch her; I became convinced of the fundamental truth of "living on." I kept saying to people, "But she is not dead!" and they thought I had gone round the bend! I became a recluse, and listened to this inner voice that kept telling me to go on and wait and grope.

INTERVIEWER

Didn't you get involved with some mediums, or "sensitives" as you call them?

LEHMANN

I went to one or two spiritualist séances but—without wanting to be too critical—I found them cheap, elementary and popular. Then I joined the College of Psychic Studies and I met Lady Sandys who has become a close friend and is a remarkable clairaudient. The College of Psychic Studies is an intellectually based Jungian organization to which many serious researchers, including doctors and scientists, now belong. Through Lady Sandys I became in touch with Sally and many others. I have written about all this in *The Swan in the Evening*. I was lucky also to meet Eileen Garrett, a celebrated medium and friend of Aldous Huxley. Huxley was very much in touch with his wife, Maria, through Eileen but was reluctant to admit it. Eileen gives an account of it in her memoirs in which she talks about how much he depended on her. Aldous came to see me after he had heard of my mystical experiences; he told me he had always longed for direct spiritual perceptions. "You are very fortu-

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nate," he said, and added very touchingly, "Perhaps I don't love enough." A rather similar thing happened with Cyril Connolly. When I heard that he was going to review *The Swan in the Evening* for the *Sunday Times* I was terrified; I thought he would demolish it. Instead he gave it a marvelous review. I couldn't believe it; obviously it had pierced through all his defenses. Later when I met him he said, "You know my mother believed in an afterlife. She died a few years ago and I miss her terribly. She was a clairvoyant, but I never mentioned it to anyone because I was ashamed of it." So I said to him: "You do believe in an afterlife, don't you?" He just turned away and didn't answer. You see, because of the prevalent skepticism of our time many people don't have the courage of their convictions. But I received hundreds of letters—and still do—from people who have lost someone and who have had spiritual experiences. More women than men write, and some say that their husbands don't believe them, insisting it is just their imagination. As if imagination were not the medium by which this *super*-reality is perceived. What they mean is "fancy," which is different. But for me God *is* imagination, the creative spirit is imagination. Women suffer the loss of a child more acutely, because with them it is a physical thing; men have not been through the process of bearing and feeding the child. Yes, on the whole I am very serene nowadays: I know that there is a life elsewhere, in another dimension, and that wherever Sally is I shall be soon.

INTERVIEWER

The Swan in the Evening was very well received; you seemed to be back in your excellent creative form. Why did you wait another seven years before producing your last novel, *A Sea-Grape Tree*?

LEHMANN

I was longing to write another novel, but my life was full with a different kind of learning and experiencing, and I felt it would be impossible to incorporate it all into a novel. I don't know of any novel that has achieved it successfully. *A Sea-Grape Tree* was an attempt, and it was meant to be more like a poem.

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I went back to Mrs. Jardine because I had always longed to know what had happened to her. The creation of a novel starts with a sort of explosion: images appear and coalesce, people and landscapes come into focus, and you say, "Oh yes, it has come back, now I can begin to write." Poets feel the same way. After eleven years of total silence, Rilke wrote the glorious *Duino Elegies*, as you may remember.

INTERVIEWER

The critics weren't very kind to your book. Were you hurt?

LEHMANN

I don't know what to think of the critics. On the whole they have been kind to my work. I was never so deeply crushed and wounded as Virginia Woolf was when she had a bad review. Leonard Woolf didn't allow her to see them. I had no one to protect me, so I did read them. Auberon Waugh, I believe, wrote a long, mocking review of the book. My granddaughter rang me and said, "Please don't read it!" And I didn't. The only thing I mind and brood about is mockery. I had a few good reviews and many letters—which are much more important for an author. I think critics didn't understand the point of *A Sea-Grape Tree*. I'm not comparing myself to Shakespeare, but the island in the book is somewhat like Prospero's in *The Tempest*. It is not a real island, but a place where those who have been wounded go to be healed—an imaginary place. I would like to write another long novel which would be a sequel to *A Sea-Grape Tree*. Perhaps the story of Rebecca and Johnny after they leave the island. Whether I shall ever finish it or not is another matter.

INTERVIEWER

Let's talk about your own technique. Once you have started a novel, once, as you said, the explosion has taken place, how do you work?

LEHMANN

It's very straightforward. I write in longhand. The first draft

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is the working draft, and no one can decipher it. Then I rewrite it, and that second draft is the book in its half-finished form. Finally I write it a third time—paring down and trimming—and then I send it to be typed. I never rewrite or touch the typescript; I simply send it to the publishers and keep my fingers crossed.

INTERVIEWER

How do you respond to people who say that the novel is a dying form, that it has lasted three hundred years, which is enough for any literary genre? Do you agree?

LEHMANN

People have been saying the novel is dead for as far back as I can remember. The novel will never die, but it will keep changing and evolving and taking different shapes. Storytelling, which is the basis of the novel, has always existed and always will. Nowadays, there are too many books and not enough good ones. I find that the women writers I most admire at the moment are biographers: Hilary Spurling's biography of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Victoria Glendening's of Edith Sitwell, Marina Warner's Joan of Arc . . . I never wrote a biography, but today women seem to be particularly good at it. The other novelists I most admire and enjoy are Anita Brookner, Alice Thomas Ellis, M.J. Farrell, William Trevor, and Sybil Bedford.

INTERVIEWER

So what is the future of the novel?

LEHMANN

Who knows? Something will have to happen, but I don't think it will come from Britain or America. Things have gone too far in sophisticated countries; the intensity of emotion, the moral conflicts, all that was the basis of great novels has gone. The change will come from somewhere quite unexpected. But it will happen—human beings have infinite resources of renewal.

—**Shusha Guppy**

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Stephen Spender's Revisions

Editor's Note

Sir Stephen Spender will soon publish his Collected Poems 1928–1985, *a re-presentation and in many cases a thorough reworking of the poetic output of a lifetime. Revision of one's early work is a time-honored yet much-debated poetic practice. To examine this latest example of poetic second sight,* The Paris Review *is printing the old and new versions of four important Spender poems with Sir Stephen's comments on the processes involved. The old versions, which appear on the left-hand pages, come from Stephen Spender's* Collected Poems 1928–1953, *and are reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.*

—J.G.

Author's Note

Readers often appear to be irritated with poets for rewriting their poems. Causes of annoyance are—

a) when a poet changes a poem to make it conform with beliefs different from those which he held when he wrote it;

b) when changes consist of a poet smoothing away some original roughness which the reader may prefer to a later more polished surface.

Also, readers may resent changes in a text simply through their conservatism, because they are familiar with an earlier version and feel that it is being taken away from them. Out of consideration for this feeling I have made only miniscule changes in poems which have been much anthologized. These poems no longer belong to me.

My justification in rewriting considerably less noticed poems is that I do not feel they were satisfactorily completed when I first abandoned them for publication. In rewriting them I

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go back to the idea I had when I first conceived these poems and try to carry it out.

With many of my poems I have the sense of total recall of the idea I had when I first wrote them: just as today if I pick up an old notebook and find there a rough draft for a poem, I can remember exactly the circumstances from which it arose and the idea of the projected poem and, sometimes, I find that I can go on writing it.

"The Sign Faehre nach Wilm" is an example of what I mean. The poem, which I wrote in the early thirties, seemed to me completed in 1932 when I first published it. Christopher Isherwood and I had taken a summer holiday on the Island of Ruegen in the Baltic, at the end of which we returned to Berlin. The night before doing so I could not sleep and had the sensations described in the poem. But after it had been published I did not feel that the poem succeeded. In the 1985 version I go back to the original feelings which are only noted down in the 1932 version.

—S.S.

The new versions of the poems "To Manuel Altolaguirre," "The Sign Faehre Nach Wilm," "Perhaps" and "The Uncreating Chaos" are reprinted from *Collected Poems*: 1928–1985 by Stephen Spender (new edition) published by Faber & Faber on 11th November. The original versions are from *Collected Poems*: 1928–1953, reprinted by permission of Faber & Faber, Ltd. and Random House, Inc.

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At the end of two months' holiday there came a night
When I lay awake and the seas' distant fretless scansion
By imagination scourged rose to a fight
Like the town's roar, pouring forth apprehension.
I was on a train. Like the quick spool of a film
I watched hasten away the simple green which can heal
Sadness. The signpost painted FERRY TO WILM
And the cottage by the lake shone, vivid, but unreal.

Real were iron rails, and, smashing the grass,
Real these wheels on which I rode, real this compelled time.
Unreal those cows, those wave-winged storks, that lime
Painted on enamel behind the moving glass.
Those burned in a clear world from which we pass
Like ROSE and LOVE in a forgotten rhyme.

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The Sign Faehre nach Wilm

At the end of our Ruegen holiday, that final night,
I lay awake. Waves' ceaseless fretful scansion
By imagination scourged, rose to the height
Of the town's roar, trafficking apprehension.
I was in a train . . . On a film's re-played spool
I watched speeding backwards things that heal
Angst. The sign FAEHRE NACH WILM,
The pink cottage by the lake, shone brilliant, yet unreal.
Real were iron lines, track smashing the grass,
Wheels on which we rode, and, on our wrists, the time.
Unreal were cattle, wave-winged storks, green lime.
These glowed in a lost planet seen through glass,
Like ROSE or FRIEND in a forgotten rhyme.

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Perhaps

The explosion of a bomb
The submarine—a burst bubble filled with water—
The Chancellor clutching his shot arm (and that was
  Perhaps
a put up job for their own photographers)
the parliament their own side set afire
and then Our Party banned
And the mine flooded—an accident, I hope.

motor-cycles wires aeroplanes cars trains
converging on that same town Geneva
top-hats talking at edge of silk-blue lake
then, the mountains.

We know things from rotating machines
from flanges stamping, cutting, unrolling sheets from rolls.
Newsmen are points of compass: their arms are
the four winds carrying printed legends.
Our eyes, fish wrapped in newspaper.

In his skidding car, the King wondered
watching the bayoneted landscape rush at him:
"Is it the enemy? (I cannot grasp it) or is it
at peace with its own peace I cannot touch?"

Was that final when they shot him? Did that war
lop off dead branches? Are the young men splendid?
Is it The Shape of Things to Come, that revolution
nosing whale-like at Antarctic edge?

Only Perhaps. Maybe that we grow smaller
donnish and bony, shut in our racing tombs:
these headlines are sides that shake and close
the dry dice rattled in their wooden box.

Maybe deception of things merely changing. Out there
Perhaps it is the dead above the plain
who grow; not our time bombs but Time
monstrous with stillness like that Alpine range.

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Perhaps

The explosion of a bomb—
The submarine—a bubble pricked by water—
Dollfuss clutching his shot arm—
The Reichstag that the Nazis set on fire—
And then our Party forbidden—

Motorcycles wires aeroplanes cars trains
Converging on that town Geneva—
Top hats plotting at the lake's edge
And the Alps beyond—

Headlines pour from rotating cylinders
Sheets from paper rolls.
Newsboys spread in compass points across
Maps, the four directions of the winds.

Was that final when they shot him? Did that war
lop off dead branches? Are we the bright new shoots?
Is it Leviathan, that revolution
Nosing through icebergs of the Arctic wastes?

Only Perhaps. It may be we are withered
Those headlines only walls around our coffin
Dry dice rattled in a bony box

Can be illusion of things merely changing
Perhaps some Unknown God is newly risen
Beyond the lake, or crucified
Perhaps our time is

Monstrous with stillness like that Alpine range.

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The Uncreating Chaos

I

To the hanging despair of eyes in the street, offer
Your making hands, and your liver, on skewers of pity.
When the pyramid sky is built with clouds of sand which the yellow
Sun trumpets above, respond to that day's judgment
With a headache. Let your spirit follow
The young men to the Pole, up Everest, to war: by love, be shot.

For the uncreating chaos descends
And claims you in marriage: though a man you were ever a bride:
Ever beneath the supple surface of summery muscle,
The fountain evening talk cupping the stars,
The student who chucks back the lock of his hair in front of the glass
You were only anxious that your despair should last.

That engine in you, anxiety,
Was a grave lecher, globe-trotter, one
Whose moods were straws, the winds that bore them, aeroplanes.
"Whatever happens, I shall never be alone,
I shall always have a fare, an affair, or a revolution."
Without your buttressing gesture that yet so leans;
Is glad as a mat
When stamped on; blood that yearns to give suck to a vampire bat;
And heart fretted by storms like the rocks at Land's End;
Without some mortal enemy who's your best friend;
You'd stand alone in a silence that never muttered
Face to face with your emptiness in an empty room.

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The Uncreating Chaos (*Double Portrait in a Mirror*)

I

To the meeting despair of eyes in the street, offer
Your eyes on plates and your liver on skewers of pity.
When the Jericho sky is heaped with clouds which the sun
Trumpets above, respond to Apocalypse
With a headache. In spirit follow
The young men to the war, up Everest. Be shot.

For the uncreating chaos
Claims you in marriage: though a man, you were ever a bride.
Ever among the supple surface of summer-brown muscle
The fountaining evening chatter under the stars,
The student who chucks back his forelock in front of a glass,
You only longed for your longing to last.

The engine in you, anxiety,
Is a grave lecher, a globe-trotter, one
With moods of straw, the winds that blow him, aeroplanes.
"Whatever happens, I shall never be alone,
I shall always have a fare, an affair, or a revolution."

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II

I am so close to you
I will confess to you
I do all you do.
At night I'm flooded by a sense of future
The bursting tide of an unharnessed war,
Drowning the contours of the present.

In thoughts where pity is the same as cruelty
Your life and mine seem one. Whether
What flows and wavers is myself—
Your thoughts in mine or mine in yours—or all
The thoughts crammed in this town—we are the same.

Beyond the windows of a waking dream,
Facts snort their hundred miles an hour
In iron circles on the iron plain.
Speed-bikes and tracks are real: and yet the riders lose
Their sense of place; they're ridden by
Their speed. The men are the machines.

All I can foresee now—more I shall learn—
Is that these fears invent their opposites.
Our peace causes war.
You're coined into a savage when you flee
The crystal civilization dangles.
And when you choose a lover like a mirror
Your own reflection changes to a gunman.
You are a ghost amid wild flares of guns.
Less living than
The shattered dead whose veins of mineral
We mine for now.
Alter your life.

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II

I am so close to you
I will confess to you
I am all that you do.

In thoughts where pity is the same as cruelty
Your life is mine. Whether
What floods and falters is myself
Or yourself—all
The apprehension of this time,
We are both one.

At night I'm flooded by the future
Incoming tide of the unharnessed war.

Beyond the blacked-out windows of our nightmare
Facts race their hundred miles an hour
In iron circles on an iron plain.
The riders of those race-cars lose
All sense of where they are.
Ridden by their speed, the men
Are their machines.

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III

Dissection of Empires, multiplication of crowns
By secret treaty. Pigeons scatter
Shot off the pavements by the fatal shot.
Heads bounce down the stone steps

Meagre men shoot up. Rockets, rockets,
A corporal's flaming tongue wags above flaming
parliament.
The tide of killers now, behold the whip-masters!
Breeches and gaiters camouflage mud.
O visions of a faltering will—
Disintegrating patterns!

History roars. The crowds in towns,
Cerebral frontiers of nations, over mountains,
Actors in flesh and death and matter,
Dance to a gripless orchestra of masses
. . . Thoughts in a dying Chancellor's brain.

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III

All I can foresee now—more I shall learn—
Is that our fear creates its opposite.
Our peace is war.
When you choose a mirror for a lover
It shows you your own image as a gunman.
You are a ghost amid the flares of shellfire
Less living than
The last war dead whose veins of mineral
We mine for here.

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IV

Shall I never reach
The field guarded by stones
Rare in the stone mountains
Where the scytheless wind
Flushes the swayed grasses:
Where clouds white without rain
Add to sky and sun
Their lucid sailing shine?
The simple machinery is here
Clear day, clear room, the plain desk,
The hand, symbols of power.
Here the veins may pour
Into the deed, as the field
Into the standing corn.
Meanwhile, where nothing's pious
And truth no longer willed,
Nor the intellect conscious,
Holy is lucidity
And the mind that dare explain.

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IV

Shall I ever reach
The field enclosed by stones
In the high mountains
Where the scytheless wind
Flushes the swayed grasses?
Where clouds without rain
Add to the sun
Their mirroring shine?
The simple machinery is here
Clear room clear day clear desk
And the hand with its power
To make the heart pour
Into the word, as the sun
Moves upward through the corn.
Meanwhile, where nothing's sacred
And love no longer willed
Nor our true purpose conscious,
Holy is lucidity
And the mind that dare explain.

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To a Spanish Poet

to Manuel Altolaguirre

You stared out of the window on the emptiness
Of a world exploding;
Stones and rubble thrown upwards in a fountain
Blown to one side by the wind.
Every sensation except being alone
Drained out of your mind.
There was no fixed object for the eye to fix on.
You became a child again
Who sees for the first time how the worst things happen.

Then, stupidly, the stucco pigeon
On the gable roof that was your ceiling,
Parabolized before your window
Uttering (you told me later!) a loud coo.
Alone to your listening self, you told the joke.
Everything in the room broke.
But you remained whole,
Your own image unbroken in your glass soul.

Having heard this all from you, I see you now
—White astonishment haloing irises
Which still retain in their centres
Black laughter of black eyes.
Laughter reverberant through stories
Of an aristocrat lost in the hills near Malaga
Where he had got out of his carriage
And, for a whole week, followed, on foot, a partridge.
Stories of that general, broken-hearted
Because he'd failed to breed a green-eyed bull.

But reading the news, my imagination breeds
The penny-dreadful fear that you are dead.

Well, what of this journalistic dread?

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To Manuel Altolaguirre

You stared out of the window at the emptiness
Of a world exploding
—Walls hurled upwards in a fountain
Dust blown sideways by the wind.
Every sensation left you
But that of being alone
With no fixed object for the eye to fix on.
You were a child again
Seeing for the first time how things happen.

Stupidly then the stucco pigeon
Stuck on the gable above your ceiling
Pirouetted outside your window
Uttering, as it did so, a loud coo.
Then everything in the room broke
Only you stayed whole
Wondering if you'd turned into your soul,
And no one with you there to share the joke.

The blood! The blood! It streamed down from your forehead.
Your fingers felt to see if you were dead.
You weren't. Proud of your wound you went
To show that golden medal to your neighbours.
But when you got to the next floor,
Through their wide open door
Beyond the bannisters
You saw them all spread out on chairs,
Grandparents, father, mother, children,
All twelve of them in bandages,
And two in splints and one on crutches.

What could you do except go back upstairs
Back to your room alone?
You ask me in your letter which I read
In London next the newspaper outspread
With headlines BARCELONA FALLEN
—Panic—street fighting—thousands fled—

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Perhaps it is we—the living—who are dead
We of a world that revolves and dissolves
While we set the steadfast corpse under the earth's lid.
The eyes push irises above the grave
Reaching to the stars, which draw down nearer,
Staring through a rectangle of night like black glass,
Beyond these daylight comedies of falling plaster.

Your heart looks through the breaking ribs—
Oiled axle through revolving spokes.
Unbroken blood of the swift wheel,
You stare through centrifugal bones
Of the revolving and dissolving world.

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Bringing this day each day my daily bread
The penny dreadful fear that you are dead.

But still your stories go on running through my head.

For example, in Valencia, of the funeral
Of your uncle, the great general
To which reluctant-nephewly you went.
With downcast sober eyes you watched your aunt
In black from head to foot, kneel down in front
Of the great coffin where her husband lay
In uniform, his medals all displayed.
Then from a corner of the room, you saw
A troop of ants that marched across the floor
Climb up a table leg and vanish in
The nearest corner of the coffin,
Then pass diagonally right through it
Out through the corner opposite
And down that table leg, each with
A morsel of the general in its teeth.
And then you saw your aunt rise from her prayers
Leaving behind a small black pool, her drawers,
As final tribute to her husband's wars.

And then . . . and then . . . there was that aristocrat
Lost for five days in the hills near Malaga
Because, abandoning his carriage,
He had been following a partridge.
And then—was it his brother who
Died broken-hearted
Having failed to breed a green-eyed bull?

It's not so much the words I hear, in memory,
As see your black eyes laughing through each story
And now, imagining your world, its ruins
Seem hurled to a circumference
The whirling of a Catharine wheel,
In whose center the unburning axle
Is your attic room where all you see
Is broken, but you stand there smiling at me.

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In the Country of Last Things

Paul Auster

These are the last things, she wrote. One by one they disappear and never come back. I can tell you of the ones I have seen, of the ones that are no more, but I doubt there will be time. It is all happening too fast now, and I cannot keep up.

I don't expect you to understand. You have seen none of this, and even if you tried, you could not imagine it. These are the last things. A house is there one day, and the next day it is gone. A street you walked down yesterday is no longer there today. Even the weather is in constant flux. A day of sun followed by a day of rain, a day of snow followed by a day of fog, warm then cool, wind then stillness, a stretch of bitter cold, and then today, in the middle of winter, an afternoon of fragrant light, warm to the point of merely sweaters. When you live in the city, you learn to take nothing for granted. Close your eyes for a moment, turn around to look at something else, and the thing that was before you is suddenly gone. Nothing lasts, you see, not even the thoughts inside you. And you mustn't waste your time looking for them. Once a thing is gone, that is the end of it.

This is how I live, her letter continued. I don't eat much. Just enough to keep me going from step to step, and no more. At times my weakness is so great, I feel the next step will never come. But I manage. In spite of the lapses, I keep myself going. You should see how well I manage.

The streets of the city are everywhere, and no two streets are the same. I put one foot in front of the other, and then the other foot in front of the first, and then hope I can do it again. Nothing more than that. You must understand how it is with me now. I move. I breathe what air is given me. I eat as little as I can. No matter what anyone says, the only thing that counts is staying on your feet.

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You remember what you said to me before I left. William has disappeared, you said, and no matter how hard I looked, I would never find him. Those were your words. And then I told you that I didn't care what you said, that I was going to find my brother. And then I got on that terrible boat and left you. How long ago was that? I can't remember anymore. Years and years, I think. But that is only a guess. I make no bones about it. I've lost track, and nothing will ever set it right for me.

This much is certain. If not for my hunger, I wouldn't be able to go on. You must get used to doing with as little as you can. By wanting less, you are content with less, and the less you need, the better off you are. That is what the city does to you. It turns your thoughts inside-out. It makes you want to live, and at the same time it tries to take your life away from you. There is no escape from this. Either you do or you don't. And if you do, you can't be sure of doing it the next time. And if you don't, you never will again.

I am not sure why I am writing to you now. To be honest, I have barely thought of you since I got here. But suddenly, after all this time, I feel there is something to say, and if I don't quickly write it down, my head will burst. It doesn't matter if you read it. It doesn't even matter if I send it—assuming that could be done. Perhaps it comes down to this. I am writing to you because you know nothing. Because you are far away from me and know nothing.

There are people so thin, she wrote, they are sometimes blown away. The winds in the city are ferocious, always gusting off the river and singing in your ears, always buffeting you back and forth, always swirling papers and garbage in your path. It's not uncommon to see the thinnest people moving about in twos and threes, sometimes whole families, bound together by ropes and chains, to ballast one another against the blasts. Others give up trying to go out altogether, hugging to the doorways and alcoves, until even the fairest sky seems a threat. Better to wait quietly in their corner, they think, than to be dashed against the stones. It is also possible to become so good at not eating that eventually you can eat nothing at all.

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It is even worse for the ones who fight their hunger. Thinking about food too much can only lead to trouble. These are the ones who are obsessed, who refuse to give in to the facts. They prowl the streets at all hours, scavenging for morsels, taking enormous risks for even the smallest crumb. No matter how much they are able to find, it will never be enough. They eat without ever filling themselves, tearing into their food with animal haste, their bony fingers picking, their quivering jaws never shut. Most of it dribbles down their chins. and what they manage to swallow, they usually throw up again in a few minutes. It is a slow death, as if food were a fire, a madness, burning them up from within. They think they are eating to stay alive, but in the end they are the ones who are eaten.

As it turns out, food is a complicated business, and unless you learn to accept what is given to you, you will never be at peace with yourself. Shortages are frequent, and a food that has given you pleasure one day will more than likely be gone the next. The municipal markets are probably the safest, most reliable places to shop, but the prices are high and the selections paltry. One day there will be nothing but radishes, another day nothing but stale chocolate cake. To change your diet so often and so drastically can be very hard on the stomach. But the municipal markets have the advantage of being guarded by the police, and at least you know that what you buy there will wind up in your own stomach and not someone else's. Food theft is so common in the streets that it is not even considered a crime anymore. On top of that, the municipal markets are the only legally sanctioned form of food distribution. There are many private food sellers around the city, but their goods can be confiscated at any time. Even those who can afford to pay the police bribes necessary to stay in business still face the constant threat of attack from thieves. Thieves also plague the customers of the private markets, and it has been statistically proven that one out of every two purchases leads to a robbery. It hardly seems worth it, I think, to risk so much for the fleeting joy of an orange or the taste of boiled ham. But the people are insatiable: hunger is a curse that comes every day, and the stomach is a bottomless pit, a hole as big as the world. The

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private markets, therefore, do a good business, in spite of the obstacles, picking up from one place and going to another, constantly on the move, appearing for an hour or two somewhere and then vanishing out of sight. One word of warning, however. If you must have the foods from the private markets, then be sure to avoid the renegade grocers, for fraud is rampant, and there are many people who will sell anything just to turn a profit: eggs and oranges filled with sawdust, bottles of piss pretending to be beer. No, there is nothing people will not do, and the sooner you learn that, the better off you will be.

When you walk through the streets, she went on, you must remember to take only one step at a time. Otherwise, falling is inevitable. Your eyes must be constantly open, looking up, looking down, looking ahead, looking behind, on watch for other bodies, on your guard against the unforeseeable. To collide with someone can be fatal. Two people collide and then start pounding each other with their fists. Or else, they fall to the ground and do not try to get up. Sooner or later, a moment comes when you do not try to get up anymore. Bodies ache, you see, there's no cure for that. And more terribly here than elsewhere.

The rubble is a special problem. You must learn how to manage the unseen furrows, the sudden clusters of rocks, the shallow ruts, so that you do not stumble or hurt yourself. And then there are the tolls, these worst of all, and you must use cunning to avoid them. Wherever buildings have fallen or garbage has gathered, large mounds stand in the middle of the street, blocking all passage. Men build these barricades whenever the materials are at hand, and then they mount them, with clubs, or rifles, or bricks, and wait on their perches for people to pass by. They are in control of the street. If you want to get through, you must give the guards whatever they demand. Sometimes it is money; sometimes it is food; sometimes it is sex. Beatings are commonplace, and every now and then you hear of a murder.

New tolls go up, the old tolls disappear. You can never know which streets to take and which to avoid. Bit by bit, the city

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robs you of certainty. There can never be any fixed path, and you can survive only if nothing is necessary to you. Without warning, you must be able to change, to drop what you are doing, to reverse. In the end, there is nothing that is not the case. As a consequence, you must learn how to read the signs. When the eyes falter, the nose will sometimes serve. My sense of smell has become unnaturally keen. In spite of the side effects—the sudden nausea, the dizziness, the fear that comes with the rank air invading my body—it protects me when turning corners, and these can be the most dangerous moments of all. For the tolls have a particular stench that you learn to recognize, even from a great distance. Compounded of stones, of cement, and of wood, the mounds also hold garbage and chips of plaster, and the sun works on this garbage, producing a reek more intense than elsewhere, and the rain works on the plaster, logging it and melting it, so that it too exudes its own smell, and when the one works on the other, interacting in the alternate fits of dry and damp, the odor of the toll begins to blossom. The essential thing is not to become inured. For habits are deadly. Even if it is for the hundredth time, you must encounter each thing as if you have never known it before. No matter how many times, it must always be the first time. This is next to impossible, I realize, but it is an absolute rule.

You would think that sooner or later it would all come to an end. Things fall apart and vanish, and nothing new is made. People die, and babies refuse to be born. In the past year I can't remember seeing a single newborn child. And yet, there are always new people to replace the ones who have vanished. They pour in from the country and the outlying towns, dragging carts piled high with their belongings, sputtering in with broken-down cars, all of them hungry, all of them homeless. Until they have learned the ways of the city, these newcomers are easy victims. Many of them are duped out of their money before the end of the first day. Some people pay for apartments that don't exist, others are lured into giving commissions for jobs that never materialize, still others lay out their savings to buy food that turns out to be painted cardboard. These are only

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the most ordinary kinds of tricks. I know a man who makes his living by standing in front of the old city hall and asking for money every time one of the newcomers glances at the tower clock. If there is a dispute, his assistant, who poses as a greenhorn, pretends to go through the ritual of looking at the clock and paying him, so that the stranger will think this is the common practice. The startling thing is not that confidence men exist, but that it is so easy for them to get people to part with their money.

For those who have a place to live, there is always the danger they will lose it. Most buildings are not owned by anyone, and therefore you have no rights as a tenant; no lease, no legal leg to stand on if something goes against you. It's not uncommon for people to be forcibly evicted from their apartments and thrown out onto the street. A group barges in on you with rifles and clubs and tells you to get out, and unless you think you can overcome them, what choice do you have? This practice is known as housebreaking, and there are few people in the city who have not lost their homes in this way at one time or another. But even if you are fortunate enough to escape this particular form of eviction, you never know when you will fall prey to one of the phantom landlords. These are extortionists who terrorize nearly every neighborhood in the city, forcing people to pay protection money just to be able to stay in their apartments. They proclaim themselves owners of a building, bilk the occupants, and are almost never opposed.

For those who do not have a home, however, the situation is beyond reprieve. There is no such thing as a vacancy. But still, the rental agencies carry on a sort of business. Every day they place notices in the newspaper, advertising fraudulent apartments, in order to attract people to their offices and collect a fee from them. No one is fooled by this practice, yet there are many people willing to sink their last penny into these empty promises. They arrive outside the offices early in the morning and patiently wait in line, sometimes for hours, just to be able to sit with an agent for ten minutes and look at photographs of buildings on tree-lined streets, of comfortable rooms, of apartments furnished with carpets and soft leather chairs—peaceful

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scenes to evoke the smell of coffee wafting in from the kitchen, the steam of a hot bath, the bright colors of potted plants snug on the sill. It doesn't seem to matter to anyone that these pictures were taken more than ten years ago.

So many of us have become like children again. It's not that we make an effort, you understand, or that anyone is really conscious of it. But when hope disappears, when you find that you have given up hoping even for the possibility of hope, you tend to fill the empty spaces with dreams, little child-like thoughts and stories to keep you going. Even the most hardened people have trouble stopping themselves. Without fuss or prelude they break off from what they are doing, sit down, and talk about the desires that have been welling up inside them. Food, of course, is one of the favorite subjects. Often you will overhear a group of people describing a meal in meticulous detail, beginning with the soups and appetizers and slowly working their way to dessert, dwelling on each savor and spice, on all the various aromas and flavors, concentrating now on the method of preparation, now on the effect of the food itself, from the first twinge of taste on the tongue to the gradually expanding sense of peace as the food travels down the throat and arrives in the belly. These conversations sometimes go on for hours, and they have a highly rigorous protocol. You must never laugh, for example, and you must never allow your hunger to get the better of you. No outbursts, no unpremeditated sighs. That would lead to tears, and nothing spoils a food conversation more quickly than tears. For best results, you must allow your mind to leap into the words coming from the mouths of the others. If the words can consume you, you will be able to forget your present hunger and enter what people call the "arena of the sustaining nimbus." There are even those who say there is nutritional value in these food talks—given the proper concentration and an equal desire to believe in the words among those taking part.

All this belongs to the language of ghosts. There are many other possible kinds of talks in this language. Most of them begin when one person says to another: I wish. What they wish for might be anything at all, as long as it is something that cannot happen. I wish the sun would never set. I wish money

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would grow in my pockets. I wish the city would be like it was in the old days. You get the idea. Absurd and infantile things, with no meaning and no reality. In general, people hold to the belief that however bad things were yesterday, they were better than things are today. What they were like two days ago was even better than yesterday. The farther you go back, the more beautiful and desirable the world becomes. You drag yourself from sleep each morning to face something that is always worse than what you faced the day before, but by talking of the world that existed before you went to sleep, you can delude yourself into thinking that the present day is simply an apparition, no more or less real than the memories of all the other days you carry around inside you.

I understand why people play this game, but I myself have no taste for it. I refuse to speak the language of ghosts, and whenever I hear others speaking it, I walk away or put my hands over my ears. Yes, things have changed for me. You remember what a playful little girl I was. You could never get enough of my stories, of the worlds I used to make up for us to play inside of. The Castle of No Return, the Land of Sadness, the Forest of Forgotten Words. Do you remember them? How I loved to tell you lies, to trick you into believing my stories, and to watch your face turn serious as I led you from one outlandish scene to the next. Then I would tell you it was all made up, and you would start to cry. I think I loved those tears of yours as much as your smile. Yes, I was probably a bit wicked, even in those days, wearing the little frocks my mother used to dress me in, with my skinned and scabby knees, and my little baby's cunt with no hair. But you loved me, didn't you? You loved me until you were insane with it.

Now I am all common sense and hard calculation. I don't want to be like the others. I see what their imaginings do to them, and I will not let that happen to me. The ghost people always die in their sleep. For a month or two they walk around with a strange smile on their face, and a weird glow of otherness hovers around them, as if they've already begun to disappear. The signs are unmistakable, even the forewarning hints: the slight flush to the cheeks, the eyes suddenly a little bigger

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than usual, the stuporous shuffle, the foul smell from the lower body. It is probably a happy death, however. I am willing to grant them that. At times I have almost envied them. But finally, I cannot let myself go. I will not allow it. I am going to hold on for as long as I can, even if it kills me.

Other deaths are more dramatic. There are the Runners, for example, a sect of people who run through the streets as fast as they can, flailing their arms wildly about them, punching the air, screaming at the top of their lungs. Most of the time they travel in groups: six, ten, even twenty of them charging down the street together, never stopping for anything in their path, running and running until they drop from exhaustion. The point is to die as quickly as possible, to drive yourself so hard that your heart cannot stand it. The Runners say that no one would have the courage to do this on his own. By running together, each member of the group is swept along by the others, encouraged by the screams, whipped to a frenzy of self-punishing endurance. That is the irony. In order to kill yourself by running, you first have to train yourself to be a good runner. Otherwise, you would not have the strength to push yourself far enough. The Runners, however, go through arduous preparations to meet their fate, and if they happen to fall on their way to that fate, they know how to pick themselves up immediately and continue. I suppose it's a kind of religion. There are several offices throughout the city—one for each of the nine census zones—and in order to join, you must go through a series of difficult initiations: holding your breath under water, fasting, putting your hand in the flame of a candle, not speaking to anyone for seven days. Once you have been accepted, you must submit to the code of the group. This involves six to twelve months of communal living, a strict regimen of exercise and training, and a gradually reduced intake of food. By the time a member is ready to make his death run, he has simultaneously reached a point of ultimate strength and ultimate weakness. He can theoretically run forever, and at the same time his body has used up all its resources. This combination produces the desired result. You set out with your companions on the

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morning of the appointed day and run until you have escaped your body, running and screaming until you have flown out of yourself. Eventually, your soul wriggles free, your body drops to the ground, and you are dead. The Runners advertise that their method is over ninety percent failure-proof—which means that almost no one ever has to make a second death-run.

More common are the solitary deaths. But these, too, have been transformed into a kind of public ritual. People climb to the highest places for no other reason than to jump. The Last Leap, it is called, and I admit there is something stirring about watching one, something that seems to open a whole new world of freedom inside you: to see the body poised at the roof's edge, and then, always, the slight moment of hesitation, as if from a desire to relish those seconds, and the way your own life seems to gather in your throat, and then, unexpectedly (for you can never be sure when it will happen), the body hurls itself through the air and comes flying down to the street. You would be amazed at the enthusiasm of the crowds: to hear their frantic cheering, to see their excitement. It is as if the violence and beauty of the spectacle had wrenched them from themselves, had made them forget the paltriness of their own lives. The Last Leap is something everyone can understand, and it corresponds to everyone's inner longings: to die in a flash, to obliterate yourself in one brief and glorious moment. I sometimes think that death is the one thing we have any feeling for. It is our art form, the only way we can express ourselves.

Still, there are those of us who manage to live. For death, too, has become a source of life. With so many people thinking of how to put an end to things, meditating on the various ways to leave this world, you can imagine the opportunities for turning a profit. A clever person can live quite well off the deaths of others. For not everyone has the courage of the Runners or the Leapers, and many need to be helped along with their decision. The ability to pay for these services is naturally a precondition, and for that reason few but the wealthiest people can afford them. But business is nevertheless quite brisk, especially at the Euthanasia Clinics. These come in several different varieties, depending on how much you are willing to spend. The

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simplest and cheapest form takes no more than an hour or two, and it is advertised as the Return Voyage. You sign in at the Clinic, pay for your ticket at the desk, and then are taken to a small private room with a freshly made bed. An attendant tucks you in and gives you an injection, and then you drift off to sleep and never wake up. Next on the price ladder is the Journey of Marvels, which lasts anywhere from one to three days. This consists of a series of injections, spaced out at regular intervals, which gives the customer a euphoric sense of abandon and happiness, before a last, fatal injection is administered. Then there is the Pleasure Cruise, which can go on for as long as two weeks. The customers are treated to an opulent life, catered to in a manner that rivals the splendor of the old luxury hotels. There are elaborate meals, wines, entertainment, even a brothel, which serves the needs of both men and women. This runs into quite a bit of money, but for some people the chance to live the good life, even for a short while, is an irresistible temptation.

The Euthanasia Clinics are not the only way to buy your own death, however. There are the Assassination Clubs as well, and these have been growing in popularity. A person who wants to die, but who is too afraid to go through with it himself, joins the Assassination Club in his census zone for a relatively modest fee. An assassin is then assigned to him. The customer is told nothing about the arrangements, and everything about his death remains a mystery to him: the date, the place, the method to be used, the identity of his assassin. In some sense, life goes on as it always does. Death remains on the horizon, an absolute certainty, and yet inscrutable as to its specific form. Instead of old age, disease, or accident, a member of an Assassination Club can look forward to a quick and violent death in the not-too-distant future: a bullet in the brain, a knife in the back, a pair of hands around his throat in the middle of the night. The effect of all this, it seems to me, is to make one more vigilant. Death is no longer an abstraction, but a real possibility that haunts each moment of life. Rather than submit passively to the inevitable, those marked for assassination tend to become more alert, more vigorous in their movements, more

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filled with a sense of life—as though transformed by some new understanding of things. Many of them actually recant and opt for life again. But that is a complicated business. For once you join an Assassination Club, you are not allowed to quit. On the other hand, if you manage to kill your assassin, you can be released from your obligation—and, if you choose, be hired as an assassin yourself. That is the danger of the assassin's job and the reason why it is so well paid. It is rare for an assassin to be killed, for he is necessarily more experienced than his intended victim, but it does sometimes happen. Among the poor, especially poor young men, there are many who save up for months and even years just to be able to join an Assassination Club. The idea is to get hired as an Assassin—and therefore to lift themselves up to a better life. Few ever make it. If I told you the stories of some of these boys, you would not be able to sleep for a week.

All this leads to a great many practical problems. The question of bodies, for example. People don't die here as they did in the old days, quietly expiring in their beds or in the clean sanctuary of a hospital ward—they die wherever they happen to be, and for the most part that means the street. I am not just talking about the Runners, the Leapers, and members of the Assassination Clubs (for they amount to a mere fraction), but to vast segments of the population. Fully half the people are homeless, and they have absolutely nowhere to go. Dead bodies are therefore everywhere you turn—on the sidewalk, in doorways, in the street itself. Don't ask me to give you the details. It's enough for me to say it—even more than enough. No matter what you might think, the real problem is never a lack of pity. Nothing breaks here more readily than the heart.

Most of the bodies are naked. Scavengers roam the streets at all times, and it is never very long before a dead person is stripped of his belongings. First to go are the shoes, for these are in great demand, and very hard to find. The pockets are next to attract attention, but usually it is just everything after that, the clothes and whatever they contain. Last come the men with chisels and pliers, who wrench the gold and silver teeth from the mouth. Because there is no escaping this fact, many

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families take care of the stripping themselves, not wanting to leave it to strangers. In some cases, it comes from a desire to preserve the dignity of the loved one; in others it is simply a question of selfishness. But that is perhaps too subtle a point. If the gold from your husband's tooth can feed you for a month, who is to say you are wrong to pull it out? This kind of behavior goes against the grain, I know, but if you mean to survive here, then you must be able to give in on matters of principle.

Every morning, the city sends out trucks to collect the corpses. This is the chief function of the government, and more money is spent on it than anything else. All around the edges of the city are the crematoria—called transformation centers—and day and night you can see the smoke rising up into the sky. But with the streets in such bad disrepair now, and with so many of them reduced to rubble, the job becomes increasingly difficult. The men are forced to stop the trucks and go out foraging on foot, and this slows down the work considerably. On top of this, there are the frequent mechanical breakdowns of the trucks and the occasional outbursts from onlookers. Throwing stones at death-truck workers is a common occupation among the homeless. Although the workers are armed and have been known to turn their machine-guns on crowds, some of the stone-throwers are very deft at hiding themselves, and their hit-and-run tactics can sometimes bring the collection work to a complete halt. There is no coherent motive behind these attacks. They stem from anger, resentment, and boredom, and because the collection workers are the only city officials who ever make an appearance in the neighborhood, they are convenient targets. One could say that the stones represent the people's disgust with a government that does nothing for them until they are dead. But that would be going too far. The stones are an expression of unhappiness, and that is all. For there are no politics in the city as such. The people are too hungry, too distracted, too much at odds with each other for that.

The crossing took ten days, and I was the only passenger. But you know that already. You met the captain and the crew, you saw the cabin, and there's no need to go over that again.

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I spent my time looking at the water and the sky and hardly opened a book for the whole ten days. We came into the city at night, and it was only then that I began to panic a little. The shore was entirely black, no lights anywhere, and it felt as though we were entering an invisible world, a place where only blind people lived. But I had the address of William's office, and that reassured me somewhat. All I had to do was go there, I thought, and then things would take care of themselves. At the very least, I felt confident that I would be able to pick up William's trail. But I had not realized that the street would be gone. It wasn't that the office was empty or that the building had been abandoned. There was no building, no street, no anything at all: nothing but stones and rubbish for acres around.

This was the third census zone, I later learned, and nearly a year before some kind of epidemic had broken out there. The city government had come in, walled off the area, and burned everything down to the ground. Or so the story went. I have since learned not to take the things I am told too seriously. It's not that people make a point of lying to you, it's just that where the past is concerned, the truth tends to get obscured rather quickly. Legends crop up within a matter of hours, tall tales circulate, and the facts are soon buried under a mountain of outlandish theories. In the city, the best approach is to believe only what your own eyes tell you. But not even that is infallible. For few things are ever what they seem to be, especially here, with so much to absorb at every step, with so many things that defy understanding. Whatever you see has the potential to wound you, to make you less than you are, as if merely by seeing a thing some part of yourself were taken away from you. Often, you feel it will be dangerous to look, and there is a tendency to avert your eyes, or even to shut them. Because of that, it is easy to get confused, to be unsure that you are really seeing the thing you think you are looking at. It could be that you are imagining it, or mixing it up with something else, or remembering something you have seen before—or perhaps even imagined before. You see how complicated it is. It is not enough simply to look and say to yourself, "I am looking at that thing."

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For it is one thing to do this when the object before your eyes is a pencil, say, or a crust of bread. But what happens when you find yourself looking at a dead child, at a little girl lying in the street without any clothes on, her head crushed and covered with blood? What do you say to yourself then? It is not a simple matter, you see, to state flatly and without equivocation: "I am looking at a dead child." Your mind seems to balk at forming the words, you somehow cannot bring yourself to do it. For the thing before your eyes is not something you can very easily separate from yourself. That is what I mean by being wounded: you cannot merely see, for each thing somehow belongs to you, is part of the story unfolding inside you. It would be good, I suppose, to make yourself so hard that nothing could affect you anymore. But then you would be alone, so totally cut off from everyone else that life would become impossible. There are those who manage to do this here, who find the strength to turn themselves into monsters, but you would be surprised to know how few they are. Or, to put it another way: we have all become monsters, but there is almost no one without some remnant inside him of life as it once was.

That is perhaps the greatest problem of all. Life as we know it has ended, and yet no one is able to grasp what has taken its place. Those of us who were brought up somewhere else, or who are old enough to remember a world different from this one, find it an enormous struggle just to keep up from one day to the next. I am not talking only of hardships. Faced with the most ordinary occurrence, you no longer know how to act, and because you cannot act, you find yourself unable to think. The brain is in a muddle. All around you one change follows another, each day produces a new upheaval, the old assumptions are so much air and emptiness. That is the dilemma. On the one hand, you want to survive, to adapt, to make the best of things as they are. But, on the other hand, to accomplish this seems to entail killing off all those things that once made you think of yourself as human. Do you see what I am trying to say? In order to live, you must make yourself die. That is why so many people have given up. For no matter how hard they struggle, they know they are bound to lose. And at that point, it is surely a pointless thing to struggle at all.

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It tends to blur in my mind now: what happened and did not, the streets for the first time, the days, the nights, the sky above me, the stones stretching beyond. I seem to remember looking up a lot, as if searching the sky for some lack, some surplus, something that made it different from other skies, as if the sky could explain the things I was seeing around me. I could be mistaken, however. Possibly I am transferring the observations of a later period onto those first days. But I doubt that it matters very much, least of all now.

After much careful study, I can safely report that the sky here is the same sky as the one above you. We have the same clouds and the same brightnesses, the same storms and the same calms, the same winds that carry everything along with them. If the effects are somewhat different here, that is strictly because of what happens below. The nights, for example, are never quite what they are at home. There is the same darkness and the same immensity, but with no feeling of stillness, only a constant undertow, a murmur that pulls you downward and thrusts you forward, without respite. And then, during the days, there is a brightness that is sometimes intolerable—a brilliance that stuns you and seems to blanch everything, all the jagged surfaces gleaming, the air itself almost a shimmer. The light forms in such a way that the colors become more and more distorted as you draw close to them. Even the shadows are agitated, with a random, hectic pulsing along the edges. You must be careful in this light not to open your eyes too wide, to squint at just the precise degree that will allow you to keep your balance. Otherwise, you will stumble as you walk, and I need not enumerate the dangers of falling. If not for the darkness, and the strange nights that descend on us, I sometimes feel the sky would burn itself out. The days end when they must, at just the moment when the sun seems to have exhausted the things it shines on. Nothing could adhere to the brightness anymore. The whole implausible world would melt away, and that would be that.

Slowly and steadily, the city seems to be consuming itself, even as it remains. There is no way to explain it. I can only record, I cannot pretend to understand. Every day in the streets you hear explosions, as if somewhere far from you a building

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were falling down or the sidewalk caving in. But you never see it happen. No matter how often you hear these sounds, their source remains invisible. You would think that now and then an explosion would take place in your presence. But the facts fly in the face of probability. You mustn't think that I am making it up—these noises do not begin in my head. The others hear them too, even if they don't pay much attention. Sometimes they will stop to comment on them, but they never seem worried. It's a bit better now, they might say. Or, it seems a little belligerent this afternoon. I used to ask many questions about these explosions, but I never got an answer. Nothing more than a dumb stare or a shrug of the shoulders. Eventually, I learned that some things are just not asked, that even here there are subjects no one is willing to discuss.

For those at the bottom, there are the streets and the parks and the old subway stations. The streets are the worst, for there you are exposed to every hazard and inconvenience. The parks are a somewhat more settled affair, without the problem of traffic and constant passersby, but unless you are one of the fortunate ones to have a tent or a hut, you are never free of the weather. Only in the subway stations can you be sure to escape inclemencies, but there you are also forced to contend with a host of other irritations: the dampness, the crowds, and the perpetual noise of people shouting, as though mesmerized by the echoes of their own voices.

During those first weeks, it was the rain I came to fear more than anything else. Even the cold is a trifle by comparison. For that, it is simply a question of a warm coat—which I had—and moving briskly to keep the blood stimulated. I also learned the benefits to be found from newspapers, surely the best and cheapest material for insulating your clothing. On cold days, you must get up very early in the morning to be sure of finding a good place in the lines that gather in front of the newsstands. You must gauge the wait judiciously, for there is nothing worse than standing out in the cold morning air too long. If you think you will be there for more than twenty or twenty-five minutes, then the common wisdom is to move on and forget it.

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Once you've bought the paper, assuming you've managed to get one, the best thing is to take a sheet, tear it into strips, and then twist them into little bundles. These knots are good for stuffing into the toes of your shoes, for blocking up windy interstices around your ankles, and for threading through holes in your clothing. For the limbs and torso, whole sheets wrapped around a number of loosely floating knots is often the best procedure. For the neck area, it is good to take a dozen or so knots and braid them together into a collar. The whole thing gives you a puffy, padded look, which has the cosmetic advantage of disguising thinness. For those who are concerned about keeping up appearances, the "paper meal," as it is called, serves as a kind of face-saving technique. People literally starving to death, with caved-in stomachs and limbs like sticks, walk around trying to look as though they weigh two or three hundred pounds. No one is ever fooled by the disguise—you can spot one of these people from half a mile off—but perhaps that is not the real point. What they seem to be saying is that they know what has happened to them, and they are ashamed of it. More than anything else, their bulked-up bodies are a badge of consciousness, a sign of bitter self-awareness. They make themselves into grotesque parodies of the prosperous and well-fed, and in this frustrated, half-crazed stab at respectability, they prove that they are just the opposite of what they pretend to be—and that they know it.

The rain, however, is unconquerable. For once you get wet, you go on paying for it hours and even days afterward. There is no greater mistake than getting caught in a downpour. Not only do you run the risk of a cold, but you must suffer through innumerable discomforts: your clothes saturated with dampness, your bones as though frozen, and the ever-present danger of destroying your shoes. If staying on your feet is the single most important task, then imagine the consequences of having less than adequate shoes. And nothing affects shoes more disastrously than a good soaking. This can lead to all kinds of problems: blisters, bunions, corns, in-grown toenails, sores, malformations—and when walking becomes painful, you are as good as lost. One step and then another step and then an-

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other: that is the golden rule. If you cannot bring yourself to do even that, then you might as well just lie down right then and there and tell yourself to stop breathing.

But how to avoid the rain if it can strike at any moment? There are times, many times, when you find yourself outdoors, going from one place to another, on your way somewhere with no choice about it, period, and suddenly the sky grows dark, the clouds collide, and there you are, drenched to the skin. And even if you manage to find shelter the moment the rain begins to fall and to spare yourself this once, you still must be extremely careful after the rain stops. For then you must watch for the puddles that form in the hollows of the pavement, the lakes that sometimes emerge from the rifts, and even the mud that oozes up from below, ankle-deep and treacherous. With the streets in such poor repair, with so much that is cracked, pitted, pocked, and riven apart, there is no escaping these crises. Sooner or later, you are bound to come to a place where you have no alternative, where you are hemmed in on all sides. And not only are there the surfaces to watch for, the world that touches your feet, there are also the drippings from above, the water that slides down from the eaves, and then, even worse, the strong winds that often follow the rain, the fierce eddies of air, skimming the tops of lakes and puddles and whipping the water back into the atmosphere, driving it along like little pins, darts that prick your face and swirl around you, making it impossible to see anything at all. When the winds blow after a rain, people collide with one another more frequently, more fights break out in the streets, the very air seems charged with menace.

It would be one thing if the weather could be predicted with any degree of accuracy. Then one could make plans, know when to avoid the streets, prepare for changes in advance. But everything happens too fast here, the shifts are too abrupt, what is true one minute is no longer true the next. I have wasted much time looking for signs in the air, trying to study the atmosphere for hints of what is to follow and when: the color and heft of the clouds, the speed and direction of the wind, the smells at any given hour, the texture of the sky at night, the sprawl of the sunsets, the intensity of the dew at dawn.

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But nothing has ever helped me. To correlate this with that, to make a connection between an afternoon cloud and an evening wind—such things lead only to madness. You spin around in the vortex of your calculations and then, just at the moment you are convinced it will rain, the sun goes on shining for an entire day.

What you must do, then, is be prepared for anything. But opinions vary drastically on the best way to go about this. There is a small minority, for example, that believes that bad weather comes from bad thoughts. This is a rather mystical approach to the question, for it implies that thoughts can be translated directly into events in the physical world. According to them, when you think a dark or pessimistic thought, it produces a cloud in the sky. If enough people are thinking gloomy thoughts at once, then rain will begin to fall. That is the reason for all the startling shifts in the weather, they claim, and the reason why no one has been able to give a scientific explanation of our bizarre climate. Their solution is to maintain a steadfast cheerfulness, no matter how dismal the conditions around them. No frowns, no deep sighs, no tears. These people are known as the Smilers, and no sect in the city is more innocent or childlike. If a majority of the population could be converted to their beliefs, they are convinced the weather would at last begin to stabilize and that life would then improve. They are therefore always proselytizing, continually looking for new adherents, but the mildness of manner they have imposed upon themselves makes them feeble persuaders. They rarely succeed in winning anyone over, and consequently their ideas have never been put to the test—for without a great number of believers, there will not be enough good thoughts to make a difference. But this lack of proof only makes them more stubborn in their faith. I can see you shaking your head, and yes, I agree with you that these people are ridiculous and misguided. But, in the day-to-day context of the city, there is a certain force to their argument—and it is probably no more absurd than any other. As people, the Smilers tend to be refreshing company, for their gentleness and optimism are a welcome antidote to the angry bitterness you find everywhere else.

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By contrast, there is another group called the Crawlers. These people believe that conditions will go on worsening until we demonstrate—in an utterly persuasive manner—how ashamed we are of how we lived in the past. Their solution is to prostrate themselves on the ground and refuse to stand up again until some sign is given to them that their penance has been deemed sufficient. What this sign is supposed to be is the subject of long theoretical debates. Some say a month of rain, others say a month of fair weather, and still others say they will not know until it is revealed to them in their hearts. There are two principal factions in this sect—the Dogs and the Snakes. The first contend that crawling on hands and knees shows adequate contrition, whereas the second hold that nothing short of moving on one's belly is good enough. Bloody fights break out often between the two groups—each vying for control of the other—but neither faction has gained much of a following, and by now I believe the sect is on the verge of dying out.

In the end, most people have no fixed opinion about these questions. If I counted up the various groups that have a coherent theory about the weather (the Drummers, the End-of-the-Worlders, the Free Associationists), I doubt they would come to more than a drop in the bucket. What it boils down to mostly, I think, is pure luck. The sky is ruled by chance, by forces so complex and obscure that no one can fully explain it. If you happen to get wet in the rain, you are unlucky, and that's all there is to it. If you happen to stay dry, then so much the better. But it has nothing to do with your attitude or your beliefs. The rain makes no distinctions. At one time or another, it falls on everyone, and when it falls, everyone is equal to everyone else—no one better, no one worse, everyone equal and the same.

Bear with me. I know that I sometimes stray from the point, but unless I write down things as they occur to me, I feel I will lose them for good. My mind is not quite what it used to be. It is slower now, sluggish and less nimble, and to follow even the simplest thought very far exhausts me. This is how it begins, then, in spite of my efforts. The words come only when I think I won't be able to find them anymore, at the moment I despair

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of ever bringing them out again. Each day brings the same struggle, the same blankness, the same desire to forget and then not to forget. When it begins, it is never anywhere but here, never anywhere but at this limit that the pencil begins to write. The story starts and stops, goes forward and then loses itself, and between each word, what silences, what words escape and vanish, never to be seen again.

For a long time I tried not to remember anything. By confining my thoughts to the present, I was better able to manage, better able to avoid the sulks. Memory is the great trap, you see, and I did my best to hold myself back, to make sure my thoughts did not sneak off to the old days. But lately I have been slipping, a little more each day it seems, and now there are times when I will not let go: of my parents, of William, of you. I was such a wild young thing, wasn't I? I grew up too fast for my own good, and no one could tell me anything I didn't already know. Now I can think only of how I hurt my parents, and how my mother cried when I told her I was leaving. It wasn't enough that they had already lost William, now they were going to lose me as well. Please—if you see my parents, tell them I'm sorry. I need to know that someone will do that for me, and there's no one to count on but you.

Yes, there are many things I'm ashamed of. At times my life seems nothing but a series of regrets, of wrong turnings, of irreversible mistakes. That is the problem when you begin to look back. You see yourself as you were, and you are appalled. But it's too late for apologies now, I realize that. It's too late for anything but getting on with it. These are the words, then. Sooner or later, I will try to say everything, and it makes no difference what comes when, whether the first thing is the second thing or the second thing the last. It all swirls around in my head at once, and merely to hold on to a thing long enough to say it is a victory. If this confuses you, I'm sorry. But I don't have much choice. I have to take it strictly as I can get it.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Paul Auster's latest work is a series of three novels, *The New York Trilogy*—*City of Glass, Ghosts,* and *The Locked Room*—which will be published by Sun & Moon Press in 1985 and 1986.

Tess Gallagher is the author of three books of poems. *Instructions to the Double* won the 1976 Elliston Book Award, and *Under Stars* was the co-winner of the 1978 Voertman Award. Her most recent book, *Willingly*, was published by Graywolf Press in 1984. Her short stories have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Antaeus*, and *The Editor's Choice* anthology.

Rose Tremain became a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1983. She received the 1984 Dylan Thomas Award for her short-story collection, *The Colonel's Daughter*. Her fourth novel, *The Swimming Pool Season*, has just been published by Summit Books. She lives in Norwich, England, with her husband and children.

POETRY

Rita Dove's books of poetry include *The Yellow House on the Corner* and *Museum*, both from Carnegie-Mellon University Press. *Thomas and Beulah* will appear later this year. A recipient of NEA and Guggenheim Fellowships, Dove is on the English faculty at Arizona State University in Tempe.

Jaan Kaplinski, a student of anthropology and of Mahayana Buddhism, was born in Tartu, Estonia, in 1941 and is one of his country's leading poets. His translator, **Sam Hamill**, is publisher of Copper Canyon Press in California. The poems published here will be included in a collection of Kaplinski's poems, *The Same Sea in Us All*, to be published by Breitenbush Books in the fall.

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Galway Kinnell's new book of poems, *The Past*, will be published this fall by Houghton Mifflin. His *Selected Poems* won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize. He lives in New York.

Sharon Olds' second book of poems, *The Dead and The Living* (Knopf), won the 1985 National Book Critics Circle Award in poetry, and was a Lamont Poetry Selection. She lives in New York.

James Schuyler's fifth book of poems, *A Few Days*, of which the title piece is printed here, will be published this fall by Random House. His last book, *The Morning of the Poem*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

For information about **Jean Sénac**, see the introductory note to the selection of his poems printed in this issue. Sénac's translator, **Mark Polizzotti**, is currently translating Jean Echenoz's novel *Cherokee* for David Godine.

Sir Stephen Spender will publish three books early next year: a new edition of his collected poems; a play, *Oedipus Trilogy*, based on the Oedipus plays of Sophocles; and his *Journals 1939–1983*, edited by John Goldsmith. Sir Stephen and Lady Spender live in London and in Provence.

FEATURE

Natalia Danesi Murray's friendship with Janet Flanner began in 1940. Mrs. Murray has had a distinguished career as a broadcast journalist and as an American representative for two of Italy's major publishers, Mondadori and Rizzoli. She lives in New York.

INTERVIEWS

Shusha Guppy is the London editor of *The Paris Review* and a regular contributor to the *Daily Telegraph*, British *Vogue*, and other periodicals.

Darryl Pinckney is on the staff of *The New York Review of Books*.

Edward Hirsch wishes to point out that **Michael Collier** was present during his interview with William Meredith, which appeared in issue #95 of *The Paris Review*, and contributed to their discussion.

ART

Glen Baxter was born in Leeds in 1944 and currently lives in London. Recent exhibitions of his drawings have been held at Anthony Stokes Gallery, London, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, and Holly Solomon Gallery, New York. He has published numerous books of drawings, including *The Impending Gleam*, *Atlas*, and *His Life, The Years of Struggle* (Knopf).

Philip Guston was born in Montreal in 1913 and died in Woodstock, New

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York, in 1980. Major exhibitions of his paintings and drawings have been held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (1962), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (1973), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1980), Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1982), and David McKee Gallery, New York.

Alex Katz was born in 1927 and lives in New York. His paintings and sculpture have been recently exhibited at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, Marlborough Gallery, New York, and Robert Miller Gallery, New York. Katz has also designed stage sets and costumes for the Paul Taylor Dance Company, and published collaborations with John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, and Harry Mathews.

The Paris Review is pleased to announce that "Grasmere" by **Amy Clampitt** (from issue #91), "The Easter We Lived in Detroit" by **Janet Kauffman** and "A Poem With No Ending" by **Philip Levine** (issue #92), and "The Hector Quesadilla Story" by **T. Coraghessan Boyle** (issue #93) have been selected for inclusion in *The Pushcart Prize, X: Best of the Small Presses* (1985–86), edited by Bill Henderson.

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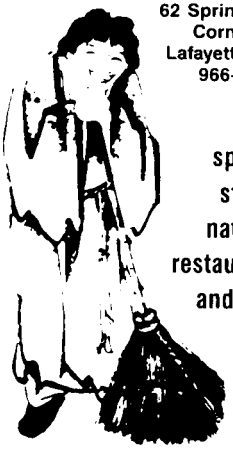

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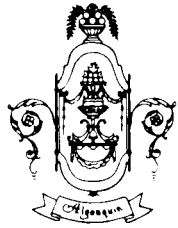

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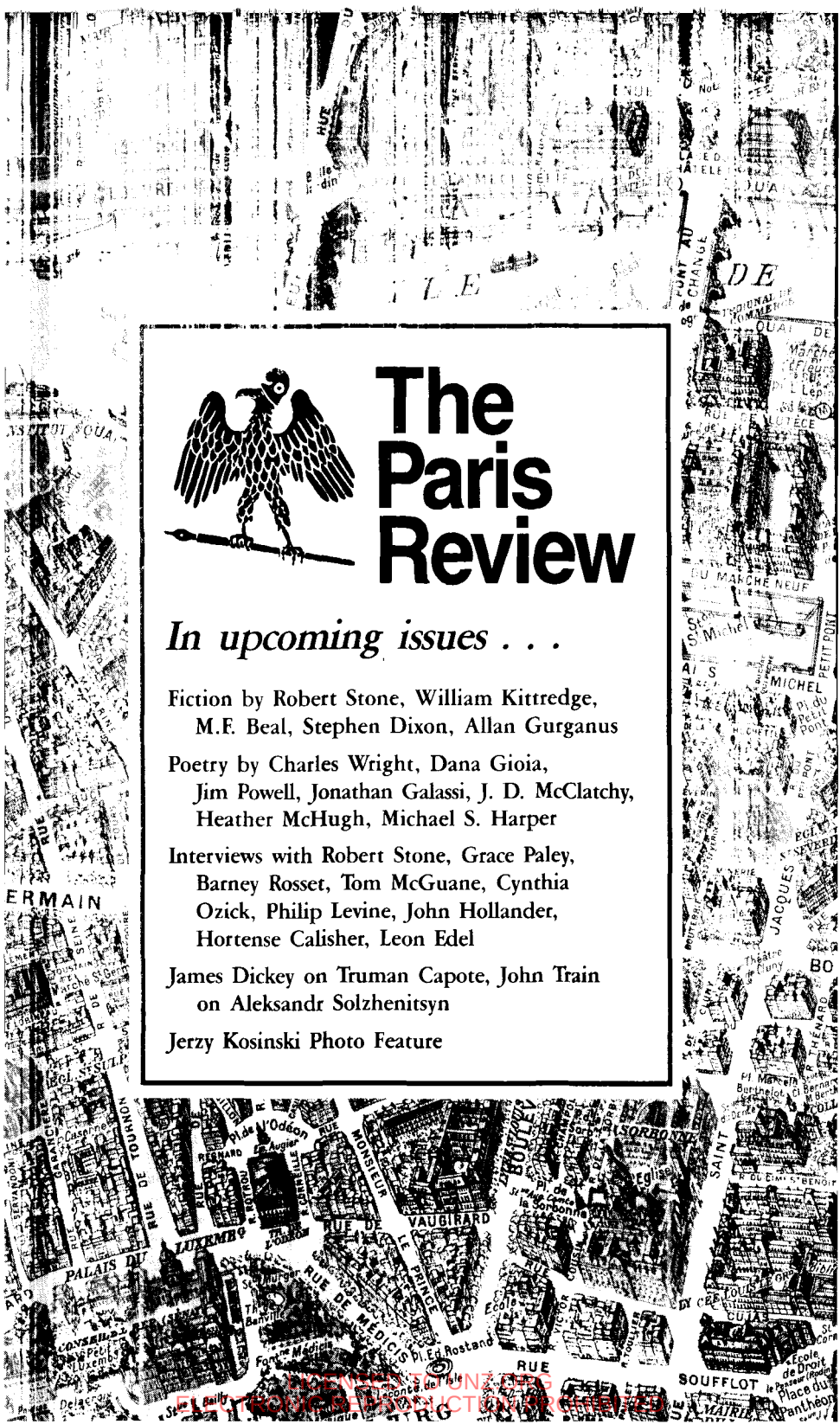

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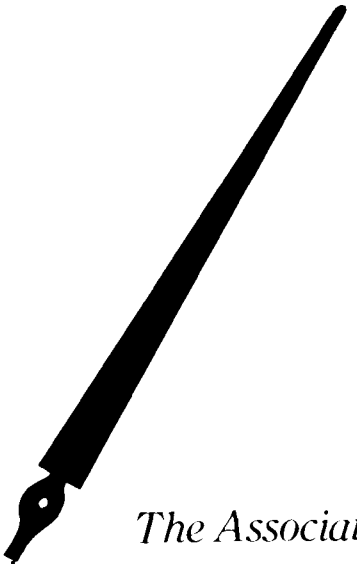

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